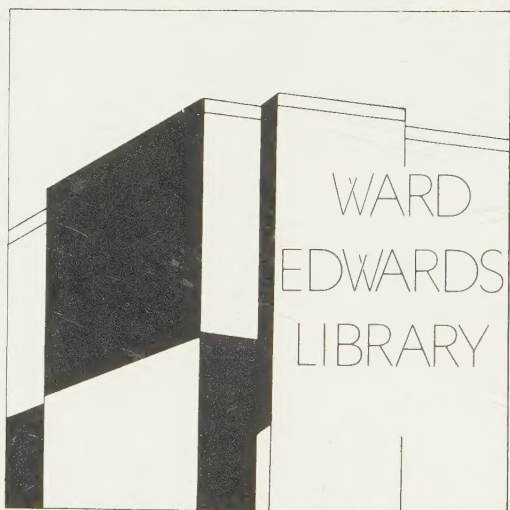
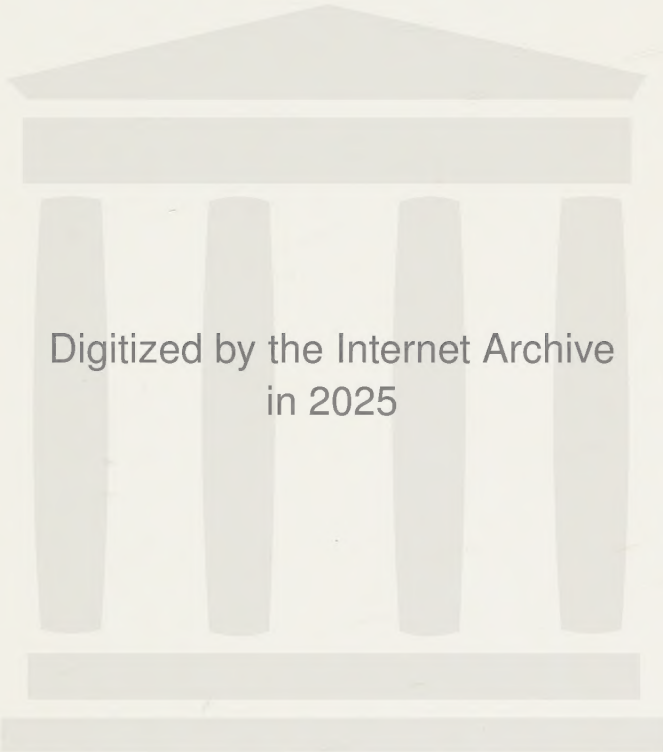






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# THE MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLMASTER

By  
HENRIETTA MATSON

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"TOM WALKED CLOSE BY THE SIDE OF THE MULE."

THE  
MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLMASTER

BY  
HENRIETTA MATSON,  
AUTHOR OF "ACTON."

WITH AN INTRODUCTION  
BY  
REV. M. E. STRIEBY, D.D., LL.D.,  
SECRETARY OF THE  
AMERICAN MISSIONARY ASSOCIATION

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## INTRODUCTION.

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THE SOUTH presents an inviting field for the novelist. Mrs. Stowe, George Cable, Miss Murfree, and many others, have availed themselves of its varied scenery, its patriarchal institution, its plantation life, and its peoples of marked peculiarities — the wealthy planter, the unique mountaineer, and the ubiquitous negro — the negro especially presenting the best types for the popular dialect stories.

But the new South is coming up. The railroad, the mine, and the factory, and especially the incoming of popular education among both whites and blacks, are producing marked changes. The reports concerning this new life are varied, and sometimes contradictory, shading off from the brightest rose color to the deepest gloom; and it is not easy to decide as to the authorities we are to trust, and the views we are to accept. So far as the negroes are concerned, there are no re-

porters more competent or reliable, than the thousands of missionaries and teachers that have gone from the North to educate them. They not only see, but they help to make the change. They take the pupil from the cabin and the cottonfield, and they mark the daily transformation, until the ragged boy becomes the teacher of his own race. This consecrated band of workers, coming as they do from the homes and churches in the North where they are known and trusted, have done much in a quiet way to form the Northern opinion in regard to the new South. The letters of these teachers have been read in the home circle, in the prayer meeting, and they have often found their way into the religious press.

But these letters are usually brief and local. The time, however, is coming, and now is, when this body of teachers will furnish writers who will use their abundant material and accurate observation of character and life to set forth in extended narrative or instructive story the transformation going on in the South.

Such is the little book before us, "THE MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLMASTER." The writer has been a close observer, and has had abundant and varied facilities for observing. She wields a facile pen, and has deep sympathy with the struggles and successes of the colored people. The story is not

sensational. On the contrary, it is well balanced in its estimates of both the black and the white races. It does present the prejudices and disabilities which hinder the negro, but not in exaggerated pictures. It tells the story of the struggles of two negro boys to obtain an education, and of their successful efforts afterwards as teachers. They are not heroes, but sensible and efficient young men. Other characters are introduced — the negro farmer, toiling under his special disadvantages; the “old auntie” with her helpful sympathy and unaffected piety, and the white man, kind in spite of his prejudices. The charm of the book is its interesting narrative, its skillful delineation of character, and its sympathy with whatever is genuine in life and piety. The reader will find it a safe, reliable, and interesting picture of life in the South.

M. E. STRIEBY.



# THE MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLMASTER.

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## CHAPTER I.

### STARTING TO SCHOOL.

THOMAS NORTH was nineteen years of age — black, tall and strong, with firmly knit muscles and a finely formed head. His hair was purely African, his eyes were large and piercing, and in repose had in them a sort of dim pain, as though the resolute soul that looked forth from their depths felt the cruelties and oppressions of the world about him more than he was willing to acknowledge. For it was a brave soul that dwelt behind the pleading eyes, not one to flinch in life's stern conflict, but rather to suffer and grow strong. He was born a slave on a Mississippi plantation, but was so young when freedom came to his people, that he knew almost nothing of a slave's life.

His grandfather was a native African — one of the tall, strong Mendi tribe, from the West Coast, and from him Thomas had inherited his great physical strength. His father was bought by a Mississippi planter in a New Orleans slave market, when a small boy, and had lived all his life in what is known as the Mississippi bottom.

His mother was a mulatto, a silent sweet-faced woman, whose whole life had been a tale of suffering and fortitude, such as is often concealed in the hidden life of a plantation slave. But in all the dreary years of her pilgrimage, at least for many years, she had known God, had known how to trust him in the darkness, and she believed that the redemption of her people was drawing near.

She died the winter after emancipation and her son was too young to remember much of her, only this — that she used to take him with her into the thick bushes of the swamp, and there, bidding him kneel beside her, with his little hand in hers, she had again and again committed him to God.

Of course, he did not understand it, nor had any memory of her words lingered with him through life, but the tones of her voice, as she pleaded with

God, had often come back to him like the forgotten strains of a lost harmony. Like a sweet vision of the night he could always recall his mother's face as she looked when they returned to their little cabin. How beautiful it was to his adoring eyes.

His mother's God had been a covenant keeping God, both to her and to her children. After her death the father found it hard to keep his family together, for there were other children, and all had to work early and late, doing the farm work, for he had leased a little land on the old plantation where he had lived all his life.

Jacob North had not his wife's faith, nor her aspirations after better things for her children which were probably born of her faith. He rejoiced in his newly acquired freedom, but expected just as much hard work as before, with this difference: he was now working for a home of his own, and a brighter future for his children.

His older children left him early, to make their own way in the world. Tom's unusual strength and ability to do work beyond his years rendered him so useful to his father that he was unwilling

to spare him to attend the freedman's school that had been opened on the plantation. But Tom caught the zeal of the other children in learning to read, for those were the days when every colored child seemed thirsting for the fountains of knowledge, as if the long pent up eagerness of generations before had descended to them.

He could not attend school with any regularity, but he learned to read, and also to write quite legibly before he was ten years old. When he had reached the age of fourteen he was planning by day and by night how he might help his father and at the same time get the much coveted opportunity of study.

Not chance but God's kind providence opened the way, so tender is his care. The God whom his mother trusted and to whom she had committed her boy led one of his own servants down into the Mississippi bottom, and made him acquainted with this aspiring and resolute black boy.

Professor Earle was connected with one of the missionary societies, which was early in the field, planting schools and establishing churches among the emancipated people of the South.

On a tour through the South he was detained at Memphis longer than he had anticipated, so that he was obliged to take one of the slow boats down the river. It stopped at one of the lonely landings which dot the Mississippi banks. Remembering that the society had a small freedman's school on a plantation not far distant, he resolved to visit it. The agent at the landing was not disposed to oblige him with any information concerning such a school, nor as to the best means of reaching it. He found it, however, after some unnecessary trouble, and was well repaid, for there was much that was interesting both in the school and in the people. The teacher was an enthusiast in her work, finding it neither monotonous nor lonely, though so far removed from home and friends. She had many interesting facts for Professor Earle concerning individual pupils whose progress she was eagerly watching, and whose history often seemed to her like a romance.

Thomas North was not attending school at the time, but Miss Raymond mentioned him, telling of his desire to study, and of the obstacles in his way. In the afternoon, Tom happened to call at the

school. Professor Earle was greatly attracted by the boy's earnest face and the manly bearing which was manifest in spite of his shyness, and his ragged and unpromising outward appearance. They went out under the shade of the trees surrounding the little church which was used as a schoolhouse. Miss Raymond was still busy with her little flock inside, and Professor Earle wished to talk a little with Tom. But conversation was difficult. Tom could only answer the gentleman's questions with yes or no, though he tried to say more, and inwardly berated his own stupidity.

After a few moments, Professor Earle said, "I think I will walk home with you, my boy; I should like to see your father."

But he did not rise at once to go. For some moments yet he sat very quietly, apparently lost in his own thoughts.

Tom stood wondering and embarrassed, with downcast eyes, and clutching his old crownless hat with one hand, while with the other he pulled at his ragged jacket. Not for worlds would he have interrupted the professor's meditations, but every moment added to the boy's shyness and consequent

torture. He was tempted to dart away and rush home, but this he dared not do. At last the dreadful silence was broken.

The professor rose, saying, "Shall we walk on, Tom?" and followed him out into the road, for Tom's reply to the question was to start briskly forward.

It was not a long walk, nor was it a direct road, but through fields and woods, sometimes a wagon track, and then only a path. In the dreadful devastations of war, fences had been wholly obliterated in many parts of the South, and only the initiated could find their way across the country, where the roads wound about at the will of the first driver or pedestrian.

They were taking the "short cut," Tom said, for the professor had put his companion more at his ease, as they went along, and they talked about the country and the crops, the overflow of the mighty river, and the distress which it often brought.

Upon reaching the cabin, the gentleman told Tom that he should like to see his father alone. When he sat down to talk with Jacob North he

immediately opened the subject that had brought him there, urging upon him the duty of educating his son.

He met with some opposition, for the father insisted upon his need of Tom's help on the plantation. He was putting in a cotton crop, and had taken more land than he could manage alone. After much persuasion, however, he was induced to name the sum which he considered an equivalent for Tom's services during the coming year. This he placed at twenty-five dollars.

The professor said he would pay it, and received in return a promise that the boy should accompany him on his return up the river, to the school which was in his own particular charge.

He left the father to communicate the news to Tom, but shook the boy's hand warmly at parting, saying, "I shall see you again soon, my boy."

Once more on the boat steaming down the river the grave professor shook his head, and then laughed heartily at himself. What drew him so to that black boy, with the large sad eyes? he asked himself, and when he thought of the twenty-five dollars, he wondered if he had not bought the

boy! To be sure there was no bill of sale, but he smiled more than once over the transaction as he sat upon the guards of the slowly gliding steamer, and watched the low banks of the river, here and there covered with tall cottonwood trees, and then only swamps and marshes as far as the eye could reach.

When he reached Dekka Landing, on his return, there stood the father and son, awaiting his arrival, almost to his surprise. The father was looking a little anxious, as if not entirely enjoying his bargain, — the son was trembling with hope and fear. He was sorry to leave his father, but to the young the future is always bright, and Tom felt that he was entering a new world which must be full of brightness, for he was at last going to school. How much that meant to him!

“Glad to see you,” was Professor Earle’s cordial greeting as he stepped on shore and took the father’s hand, at the same time placing the promised money in the open palm.

“And now, my boy, you must say good-by to your father, and let me assure him he shall hear from you often. They will be good reports too, I

hope, which will make him glad he has sent you to school."

Then the whistle blew, the professor and Tom went aboard, the boat moved out into the broad river, and Tom went with it into the wide world, never to return to the life he had left behind.

Reuben Strong was almost the opposite of his friend Thomas North, in appearance, in character and in the influences which had surrounded him from earliest childhood. He was now seventeen years of age, slender and delicate in form and features. His face was very fair, the Saxon blood so predominating that it was almost impossible to believe he had any claim to African descent. His hair was a sunny brown, lying in softly curling rings upon a broad open forehead. His eyes were large and soft, and changeable in color, from gray to a dark blue, and his mouth had that sensitive curve which bespeaks great power to suffer and enjoy.

Reuben's mother showed very slight traces of African descent, but just as emphatically belonged to the despised race. She was a woman of great

natural refinement, but one on whom the blight of slavery had fallen most heavily. After the war was over, she lived alone with her only child in a small Southern town, supporting herself by sewing.

Her little son was carefully trained, so far as the mother was able. He attended Sabbath-school as soon as he could be admitted to the infant class, and learned to read when very young.

His mother attended a night school, which was taught in connection with the colored school of the place. Here the older people, the mothers and fathers, as well as the boys and girls who could not be spared from work during the day, gathered to learn to read and write, — a few to go further in the rudiments of an education. Their enthusiasm and zeal in those early days of freedmen's schools was something inspiring. Sometimes old men and women bent with age and infirmity courageously toiled over their books. "Only just to spell out de name ob Jesus in de Bible " was the reason often given by an aged saint.

Mrs. Strong also went with Rube to Sabbath-school, where she entered a class of older pupils, and was a devoted student of God's Word.

When Rube was ten years old, his mother took him to Professor Earle's school. Mrs. Earle smiled and thought it a harmless vanity on the part of the mother, when she said, —

“I thought my boy was too pretty to be brought up in ignorance, and I am going to educate him.”

But when Mrs. Earle looked at little Rube more closely she saw that he was indeed a beautiful child, of whom any mother might be proud.

Reuben came to be a great pet in the school, for he was the youngest of the flock, but he was of too sweet a nature to be greatly harmed by petting, and early came under the strong religious influences of the school. These told upon him as well as upon Thomas North, in forming their characters and fitting them for the hard battle of life.

But we will look at the school attended by them.

## CHAPTER II.

## SUMNER INSTITUTE.

PROFESSOR EARLE had a school for boys—colored boys, though not to the exclusion of whites, as the presence of his own little rosy-faced son in the daily classes announced.

It was taught by himself and wife and two young ladies. He called it Sumner Institute, partly because the great statesman was his friend, and partly because there seemed a peculiar fitness in calling a school, established particularly for the youth of the emancipated race, after one who had devoted so much of his public life to their interests, and who in their darkest days of bondage had known what it was to suffer for them.

The school occupied a large old-fashioned house on a quiet street in a beautiful Southern city. The place was confiscated by the government during the war, and was never afterwards reclaimed. For a few years it was unoccupied, standing empty

and silent, as though holding within its walls memories too sacred for the intrusion of strangers. Then Professor Earle, assisted by friends, bought it and opened his school there. The house was old and had a very dilapidated and forsaken appearance, though it had once been imposing enough.

It was roomy and high, with broad verandas on three sides, and extensive grounds, for when it was built it stood on the very outskirts of the town. The town had crept up to it on all sides, and closed in upon it, but the old place stood lonely and defiant, as if vainly trying to remind the world of its former importance.

It is sometimes hard to believe that an old house like this, so full of memories of the past, is not a sentient being; that it does not at times send forth a wail of pain over its own desolation and desertion; that the ghosts of all that was once glad and beautiful and sweet, as well as of the sorrows and griefs that were born there, may not flit through the forsaken rooms, instead of the shadows of former occupants, which so proverbially haunt old houses.

The wide yard was filled with very old trees,

and not a few of them showed by their ragged tops and twisted limbs what ravages the storms had made with them. All the shrubbery and flowers were destroyed in war time by the tramp of the soldiers who from time to time found shelter there, so that the once beautiful grounds surrounding the house wore the same appearance of neglect and desertion that the old mansion presented.

When Professor Earle took possession there was much to repair both in the house and about the grounds, but it was not long before the old place began to have a less forlorn and neglected air, and to look something like the hospitable home it was in better days. If it might never again assume the stateliness and grandeur of the old time, it was comfortable and inviting, corresponding to the warm welcome given to all who came under its roof.

Several changes in the arrangement of the house were necessary to accommodate the school, and yet it was very inadequate.

On the first floor, the large parlors, front and back, were thrown into one, for a chapel and for various school purposes. Here the entire school

assembled for morning devotions. Afterward it was used as a study hall, and for some recitations. All public exercises were held here, and on Sunday the "church in the house" gathered here for public worship.

On the other side of the hall were two rooms, one Professor Earle's particular sanctum, but which was also used for a few classes, and back of it the room in which Miss Whately taught the younger boys and where they remained all day for study and class work, after the opening exercises in the chapel.

Beyond these was a large dining room. The kitchen quarters were detached from the main building, as is usual in Southern houses. The teachers occupied the second floor, and the large, high attic was at first fitted up for dormitories for the boys; but the school very soon outgrew these quarters and two long rows of barrack-like buildings were erected in the rear of the old house and all the boys now roomed there.

This was the home and school to which Thomas North was introduced when Professor Earle brought him from Mississippi.

At first the boy was very unhappy. Everything was so new and strange. It was a new world opened to him — a beautiful world. Not for a moment would he have thought of returning to the old plantation life, but as the earthly soul must become familiar with the air of heaven, before enjoying its transports of bliss, so this poor boy had to become accustomed to these new surroundings before he could enjoy them.

He entered Miss Whately's room with the pupils of the lowest grade, and soon became at home with his teacher, whose serious gray eyes looked so kindly upon him.

His eagerness to learn overcame his difficulties in the schoolroom, to a great extent, but the lonely life he had led on the plantation made him unfamiliar and backward with people. His brief attendance at Miss Raymond's school, and occasional visits at the country store, comprised nearly all the intercourse he had ever had with the outside world.

The boys were jolly and full of good fellowship, but he had never been used to play. Planting and hoeing and gathering cotton had been almost the sum total of life to him.

In the dining room, his shyness and awkwardness reduced him to a state bordering upon terror. Students and teachers sat at the same tables, in pleasant home-like relations, ten or twelve persons at one table, which was presided over by a teacher. Tom sat at Miss Bateman's table, who chatted with the boys around her as pleasantly as if in her own family.

Miss Bateman taught in the high school, and Tom stood very much in awe of her at first, but after a while he found himself listening to the stories she told — stories of heroes, and of adventure in wonderful lands far away. The other boys asked questions, and laughed and talked at their ease, but Tom listened with downcast eyes.

It was not until he began to feel acquainted with Miss Bateman that she told him quietly how to manage his knife and fork, and gave him kindly little hints which helped him wonderfully.

His room, No. 24, was a clean, cozy little place, and here he first met Reuben Strong. They were roommates from the first, and destined to be great friends, though Tom was rather older than "little Rube," as he was then called. No. 24 was the

last room at the end of the first row, so they had a window looking toward the sunset. An old magnolia tree stood near, and a whole chorus of mocking birds poured forth their sweetest melody on bright mornings.

The two boys became acquainted very easily, as boys will do, when left to themselves. It was evident that Rube was more familiar with the refinements of life than Tom, and this was soon understood by the shy, awkward Mississippi boy.

Rube was full of boyish fun, and nothing would have pleased him better than to tease Tom, had he known the extent of his ignorance in certain matters on which he prided himself as understanding fully. But Tom's quiet, reticent nature helped him here, and Rube never knew his secret amazement over the belongings of their room.

Sheets on the bed! and white pillow cases, which were changed every week! These seemed the height of grandeur to the boy. He had often felt he should like to speak about it to Rube or some one else, but he had strong reasons to suspect that Rube as well as other boys had some fun at his

expense, and this conviction prevented his asking questions after the first few days' experience.

That which perplexed him most was the queer thing that looked like the chest of drawers that belonged to "old Miss" at home. It stood in the chapel, just in front of Professor Earle's desk, and in the morning devotions Mrs. Earle sat down before it, touching and patting little white things they called keys; and oh, the music that came from the queer thing!

The teachers and the boys sang, and Mrs. Earle made music from the chest of drawers, which seemed another voice, only stronger and deeper and sweeter than anything he had ever known, and which sent strange and wonderful thrills to the deepest places of his music-loving soul. For undeveloped though it was, the love of music and the power to produce it was in this rude untaught boy. Tom said to himself that he would not ask the boys about it, but he would ask Miss Whately some time. She told him all about it, sitting down to the instrument and playing for him, then coaxing him to touch the white keys for himself.

What wonderful revelations were coming to

this untutored boy, with an eager, active mind, which took in knowledge from every source, as the thirsty earth drinks in the water that falls after a long drought!

There were other boys in Sumner Institute, just as awkward and wondering as Tom, but all did not have his tact in concealing their ignorance from the wiser ones. There were also others just as thirsty for knowledge, though possibly all were not so earnest and intent in its pursuit. The teachers, who were filled with zeal and enthusiasm in their work, did not know how much of it was inspired by this eagerness on the part of their pupils. The ordinary schoolboy often seems to his long-suffering teacher to calculate on how many lessons he can escape, and how much of fun and anything but study can be accomplished in a given time. Nor is the average colored boy in school a saint or a scholar. Indeed there is always enough mischief in him to keep a teacher on the alert, and there are laggards and idle ones, but there is a thirst for knowledge in the hearts of these children of a once oppressed race which is not so generally found among those to whom long gen-

erations of culture have made its acquirement a matter of course.

So thought Professor Earle as, day after day, he watched the eager faces upturned to him in the chapel devotions, where he opened up God's Word to them, making it luminous even to the dullest understanding. The chapel services were not mere opening exercises. Professor Earle always went to them with a heart yearning after the souls of his pupils, and the teachers were of the same mind, their hearts going out in prayer that the living Word might be with power.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE NEW LIFE.

ON the first morning that Tom entered school, taking the seat that was assigned him in chapel, he was deeply impressed with the reading of Scripture, and the prayer that followed moved him strangely. Professor Earle drew near to God, as did Moses of old, bringing his pupils and all the interests of his school with him, with no formality, but with a directness of approach that came only from a personal acquaintance with God and communion with him. He spoke with God, forgetting the presence of all others, and God spoke with him, sending answers of peace to his soul. His reading of the Scriptures had the same characteristics. The tones of his voice vibrated with the feeling that welled up in his heart, because of the great reality there was to him in God's Word. And because in this childlike simplicity he came to God, God met him, and met the pupils of his

school also through him. It was not the power of any personal magnetism in reading, it was not because he was gifted in prayer, nor that his was a large sympathetic nature; all this may have been true of him; but it would never have given him power with God or man. Jacob became a prince and had power with God, when all his self-life had been conquered by the wrestling angel and he had seen God face to face.

The pupils of Sumner Institute did not reason all this out, but they felt that God was near in their morning devotions, and something of the solemnity that rested upon them there went with them all the day.

Tom could not have told how or why he was affected. It was at first only a stirring in the boy's soul, a vague unrest, a something that made him toss on his pillow at night, until the soft, pleading voice of his mother came back to him. Again the stars were shining above his head and the dew glistened in the moonlight, as it rested upon the leaves of the willow in the old marsh swamp, where he knelt by his mother, with his hand in hers.

The soul of the boy had been asleep all these years ; but the resurrection had come ; the angel had descended to roll away the stone, and soon he would rise to a new life. God had not forgotten the prayers of that slave mother.

Rube had been often touched, and sometimes strongly moved by the religious influences of the school, ever since he first entered it, but the great decision had not yet been made. He was just the opposite of Tom in nature, frank, free, open-hearted, careless and happy. He was impulsive and generous to a fault.

It was interesting to watch the operation of the same Spirit on these two natures so unlike.

They were both very dear to Miss Whately. She was praying for them, and greatly coveted them for the Master. Oh, that they might be consecrated to his service, was the constant cry of her heart. What promise of future usefulness there seemed in their young lives, if they were only laid upon God's altar !

But the weeks went on. The long summer faded into the more beautiful autumn, and then came the rain and chill, which means winter in the

South and which is often harder to endure than the more positive and intense cold of the North.

Steady advancement marked Tom's connection with the school. The new life was becoming more familiar to him; Sumner Institute was more and more homelike. Sometimes he wondered indeed if he had not always been there, if all before had not been a dream. And yet, neither he nor Rube had yielded their hearts to the service of Him to whom they owed so much.

At last Rube found peace and great joy. His seemingly careless nature had been deepening for a long time, and there were troubled depths in his beautiful eyes. Professor Earle watched him with a father's care, for he knew that God was dealing with this soul, and probably the turning point in the boy's life would be reached in those days of heart searching. For several days Rube was in deep distress on account of sin. A mighty conviction that he was a sinner in God's sight and lost without his mercy seized upon him, and he felt that he must find God, and that speedily. Sin in all its enormity, as the Holy Spirit reveals it, was made known to him, and he realized that unless

a strong arm should interpose to rescue him he was a lost soul. Then he gave himself entirely to seeking the Saviour. He could not study, and his teachers wisely saw that One greater than earthly instructors was speaking to the boy. Eternal interests were at stake, and they could only silently pray for him.

He was so powerfully wrought upon that at last he could neither eat nor sleep. There were no extra meetings in the school at this time, only the ordinary exercises, but God's Spirit was moving upon hearts. In chapel services, one morning, when Rube was in this intense state, the reading of the Scriptures so affected him that he sobbed aloud.

Professor Earle hoping to calm him, and at the same time point him to the Saviour of sinners, sang very softly:—

Oh, the blood ! the precious blood,  
That Jesus shed for me,  
Upon the cross, in crimson flood,  
By faith, just now I see.

Still the light did not break in upon him. The "precious blood" was not applied until the next

day when as he was alone in his room Jesus himself drew near and revealed himself as to the disciples of old.

Ah, what a revelation it was to this boy, who had so longed for the coming of the Master! Jesus had indeed come to him, and manifested himself as he does not unto the world. Rube could almost touch the shining garments, in the glory that was revealed to him. Ah, Jesus, Master, would that more of those who are thine own, could see thy glory, with open vision! not sweet glimpses of thy face only, but face to face, beholding the King in his beauty. How it would lift them above the fogs, the doubts and fears of earth!

It was in the morning school hours. Rube had been excused to his room, and for a long time he remained on his knees in rapture of joy and surprise. Then Tom came in from school, and Rube rose from his knees, went to his roommate and putting his arms about his neck, sobbed out,

“Oh, Tom, I’ve found him, I’ve found him! It is Jesus, Jesus! Oh, Tom, he is my Saviour, and I am so happy, so glad, I can not tell you!”

His voice was very low and sweet; his face was

glorified. The interview that he had had with his Lord had left an impress upon his face beyond any earthly loveliness. Many of us have seen that look on human faces, and we always think of the angels in heaven who behold the face of the Father.

Tom was greatly startled; he could not understand it; how could he? But he was affected much as though he had had a glimpse into heaven, from which he seemed forever shut out. He was more deeply moved than he had ever been before. He was not so emotional as Rube, had not yet been so profoundly stirred, because he had never been so deeply in earnest. He was glad that Rube had "found Him," but the language of the redeemed is always an unknown tongue to those who have not learned it from the great Teacher. Tom had not even learned the alphabet, he could not understand such joy as Rube manifested. He was afraid to speak, and almost afraid of Rube, from whom he seemed suddenly separated. A something he could not comprehend had come between them.

Tom was very miserable, almost resentful, for Satan was ready to whisper many an evil and un-

kind thought. He went however with Rube to Professor Earle and the other teachers, and again listened to the wonderful story of redemption — so old, yet ever new.

The boys who had been praying for Rube gathered round him, and amid much hand shaking and fervent thanksgiving the story was repeated. Then they went into Professor Earle's room, as many as could get in, and the dear professor knelt down with his boys around him, and such a prayer of thanksgiving was poured out as must have made the angels take up the strain and sound it through the courts of heaven. After this, they all sang with smiles and tears of joy:—

I've been redeemed, I've been redeemed,  
Been washed in the blood of the Lamb,  
Been washed in the blood of the Lamb,  
That flowed on Calvary.

## CHAPTER IV.

## CHRISTMAS.

CHRISTMAS-TIME in the Southern States has always been a season of great festivity. In the olden time, or before the war, the celebration of Christmas, on the large plantations, reminds one of Irving's description of the English Christmas in rural homes, when "all ranks blended in one warm generous flow of joy and kindness."

It was the time of "peace on earth and good will to all," and the slave had especial reason for regarding it as the most joyful season of the year. The master then dispensed to his household the clothing needed for the year, making it a Christmas gift. It was accepted with a fervor of thanks and blessings upon the generous master.

On the part of many this gratitude was sincere and the gifts were received with a child-like dependence befitting the patriarchal nature of the institution; but this class was generally largely com-

posed of children and aged persons. Among the younger and the middle-aged of a slave community there have always been those who rejected with secret scorn and contempt this dependence which has been so eloquently discoursed upon by the defenders of the system. It is not probable that they often manifested this feeling, but the thinking black man who wore his chains in seeming submission knew and felt how necessary it is to be just before one can be truly generous.

It is true that in more liberal families, often more than the mere necessities of life were given, especially to favorite servants, and little work was required during the whole week, except from house servants whose services were necessary. They had their share in decorating the great house with holly and mistletoe, and their own little cabins were sometimes gayly decked with the same, for the negro has an innate love of beauty; and doubtless the humble little home as well as the stately mansion where the master lived, often rang with the song and merriment to which the season was given. In the towns and cities, the same idea of merry-making prevailed, and the holy Christmas time

was often celebrated with drinking and rioting, more like a heathen festival than like the anniversary of the birth of the Saviour of men. But however much there was to be deprecated in the manner of the celebration, there was in it the idea that the birth of Christ was to all men a time of joy, when every sorrow and all bitterness should be forgotten in the spirit of peace and good will toward all.

It is not strange that the South of to-day celebrates the Christmas holidays in a manner quite unlike the North, for the colored people of the present generation have traditional ideas of the time, which have come down to them from the old days of slavery.

The holiday extends through the whole week, from Christmas to New Year's day inclusive, and the time is given up to general good cheer. Small boys indulge in firecrackers and torpedoes, greatly to the annoyance of their elders. "Christmas gift," greets one on every side. It does not always mean a request for a gift, but is equivalent to the "Merry Christmas" to which the child of Northern birth has always been accustomed.

No Southern children, whether white or black, could be happy without a Christmas week, and Professor Earle and his teachers saw no reason why it should be omitted from their calendar. So, when the Christmas time drew near, there was a delightful excitement pervading the atmosphere of Sumner Institute, not jubilant perhaps, but betraying itself in the various ways peculiar to school life. Classes went on in regular routine, preparation for examinations and for the closing exercises of the term occupied even more than the usual time for study, and yet underneath it all was an unaccustomed ripple and stir that occasionally bubbled forth into a pleasant and healthful excitement. Teachers as well as pupils partook of it.

Mrs. Earle did not talk much of it, but she *looked* a great deal, and what she did say was exaggerated in the minds of the boys to mean much. She was a great favorite with the boys, no one ever being afraid of her, as they sometimes were of Miss Bateman or even Miss Whately. Evil doers could confess to her their shortcomings, and receive sharp words of reproof from her without resentment. Her words always probed to the

bottom of whatever sin or mistake the guilty one brought to her, and produced the fruits of repentance. She loved the boys, and they knew it, and since love is the "greatest thing in the world" it conquers hearts when nothing else can.

She had charge of the household at Sumner Institute. She also trained the boys in singing, and had general charge of the music in their meetings. Many a lonely boy was comforted and made to forget his loneliness by a timely invitation upstairs to her parlor, where they had what she called a family concert.

School closed for the holidays on Christmas eve, and the days preceding were full of examinations and exercises connected with the closing term. Mrs. Earle, however, having no immediate connection with the classes, was busy with preparations for the coming festivities. Both teachers and students assisted her as they could find leisure from school duties. There was an unusual bustle and stir in the kitchen. The cook, an old colored woman who thoroughly understood her department, was preparing a Christmas dinner, which she declared would make "dem dar chillens smile all over der faces."

The whole house was decked with evergreens and trailing vines. Neither the holly with its dark rich leaves and crimson berries nor the shining mistletoe was wanting. The boys searched the woods and brought home many a green treasure of moss and leaf which helped to brighten up the old place, and remind them that it was a time of joy.

Professor Earle, accompanied by two or three of the older boys, went to the woods himself for the greatest treasure — the large Christmas tree.

It was a wide-spreading spruce, so large that it was difficult to get it up the broad stairway, and its woody fragrance filled the house with sweet-smelling odors. It was placed in the parlor upstairs, the top touching the high ceiling, while its roots were planted in a box which was strewn with brilliant forest leaves, among which were scattered some of the gifts, like ripe fruit dropped from an overloaded tree.

Nearly every boy in school had a hand in getting the tree upstairs, and planting it. The fun and noise and general jollity were enough to delight any boy's heart. Then came the dressing of the tree, from which the boys were shut out, but which

afforded as much pleasure to Mrs. Earle and the young lady teachers as if they had been in their own home and were providing gifts for their own dear ones. There was the same bustle and excitement, the same secret conferences and whispered confidences that always abound at Christmas time. No one was forgotten, and the beautiful tree bore all manner of fruit, in season and out of season.

On Christmas day they met in the morning as usual for devotions in the chapel. The reading of Scripture told of the Saviour's lowly birth, while the hymns and prayer were full of thanksgiving for his coming to save the world.

The dinner was such a success that the "children" were made glad and happy enough to fulfill Aunt June's prediction. There were games for the boys, and good times generally, until at last the bell rang that was to summon them to the parlor. Every member of the family found a place, teachers, students and servants, not omitting Baby Earle, who crowed in triumph, waving his chubby hands when carried into the brilliantly lighted room.

The night was unusually mild, and though a fire blazed in the grate, the windows were all

thrown open, and the evening air came in fresh and sweet as in springtime. The room extended the whole length of the building. When the house was repaired, folding doors were placed between the parlor and the adjoining room, for just such occasions as this. Both rooms were covered with a thick carpet of bright, soft tints, and pots of flowers were blooming in the open windows. There were books and pictures and beautiful things scattered about, such as are found in homes of refinement and culture, and which are themselves educating influences. The room was brilliantly lighted, and near the lower end stood the stately tree, to which all eyes were turned. At the other end of the room stood an organ, and as many chairs had been provided as the room could comfortably hold. They were hardly sufficient to accommodate all, but the younger boys were glad of an excuse to sit on the floor.

Time had been given for talking and laughing, and for admiring glances to be cast upon the tree, when Professor Earle said that they seemed to understand what had brought them together, and it was plain that the chief attraction was the wonderful

tree, growing so miraculously. It really seemed too beautiful to pluck the fruit at once, leaving it barren and bereft of its beauty, so he would first tell them something about trees of this species.

Then he talked of Christmas — what it means to us, and how it has come to be a custom, the world over, to give gifts at this time to those dearest to us. The old, old story was rehearsed in all its beautiful details. How the three wise men, on white camels, bearing the richest gifts from three waiting nations, traversed the desert, directed by God's spirit, and came to the wondrous babe of Bethlehem. Mrs. Earle went to the organ and they all joined in singing that dear old hymn : —

While shepherds watched their flocks by night  
All seated on the ground,  
The angel of the Lord came down,  
And glory shone around.

Then the professor depicted that wondrous scene on the hills of Bethlehem, until it became a vivid reality to every child present. Mrs. Earle played again, and three little boys sang a Christmas carol, which Professor Earle had written for the occasion. After this Miss Bateman told them the

legend of St. Christopher and of the beautiful Christ-child in other stories.

How intently they all listened! How their dark faces glowed in the firelight! There were three or four old colored people present, servants in the family, and these frequently responded to the religious part of her stories, with a fervent "Amen," and "Thank God!"

An hour was spent in this pleasant intercourse, and the boys with their eager, hungry minds gained new ideas of what the holy Christmas time means, and why it is, as it should be, a time of great joy. A few of the younger boys had grown a little impatient, wondering when they would "come to the tree," but nearly all seemed to have enjoyed the pleasant waiting.

At last the beautiful tree yielded its fruit, and the distribution of gifts caused many a glad surprise. Each boy who did not already possess one was presented with a small pocket Bible, and of other gifts, both small and great, there was a rich abundance. Every one was remembered, every one was happy, and all went away with a drawing towards Him who descended from heaven and gave gifts unto men.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE WATCH MEETING.

THE week that followed was full of good times for the boys. Professor Earle took them to places of interest in the city, and the mild weather rendered one or two excursions to the country most enjoyable.

One or two days were spent working on the grounds surrounding the old house. Great changes had been wrought in the general appearance of the place, since its occupation by the school. The old trees had been so carefully trimmed, from time to time, that new branches had put forth, and the trees had grown larger and more beautiful. New shrubbery had replaced the old—the walks and single driveway were kept scrupulously neat, and in their season flowers of every hue bloomed as they had done years before, gladdening human hearts, as they did then. Thus the Christmas week passed, and on the last night of the old year a watch meeting was held.

Possibly, the all night meetings of the colored people had first suggested it to Professor Earle, for he was ready to take advantage of any means or customs that promised good to his pupils.

Only those who really desired to do so were invited to attend, and it was supposed that the meeting would be small; but promptly at ten o'clock the boys began to assemble in the well-lighted chapel, and soon very nearly the entire school was there.

Some of the boys were sleepy and yawning when they came, but were evidently determined not to be counted out in anything that was going on in Sumner Institute. Others went prompted by curiosity, or because their friends went, but the larger number of the students had been looking forward to this meeting with very deep interest. Many had come prayerfully. They were but children in divine things, but there were those there who knew what it was to seek God's face and to desire his blessing, especially as they looked forward to the untried paths into which the new year would lead them.

Professor Earle read the ninetieth psalm. When

have not hearts been impressed with the beauty and simplicity with which the brevity of life and the reality of eternity is set forth by this "prayer of Moses, the man of God"? Our hearts cry out with him, "O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days."

Tom and Rube sat together. Rube's sweet, boyish voice was heard in every hymn, singing as he had never sung before at such a meeting, with such a joyous ring, that Miss Whately turned to see if his face had as much of joy in it. But her eyes rested on Tom's sad, serious face.

Tom wore a resolute look to-night, as though a new purpose was born in his soul. There was no brightness, no joy in the dark face, and his eyes were dim with tears. He had been powerfully affected by Rube's conversion, for no one could resist the sweet, earnest spirit of the boy, and they were so closely associated that it was constantly before him.

Rube was very anxious to see Tom come into the blessedness which he possessed, and was earnestly praying for it. Every one feared that in the excitement of the holidays Tom and others who had

been most interested in eternal things would become careless or indifferent and disposed to put off the decision to which God's spirit had been urging them.

To Tom's thoughtful nature, however, the events of the last few weeks were so many revelations of God's goodness which he had not thought much about before, though he had been very grateful to his human friends. For a long time there had been a vague longing in his soul for something better than he knew, but since Rube's conversion, all these impulses and desires had greatly deepened.

Tom often sat in the schoolroom with so sad a face that his teacher would go quietly to his side, and unnoticed by the other pupils would whisper a word to him about Jesus, or would only let her hand rest on his head a moment, but with so tender a touch that Tom understood. Again she would slip a brief little note into his hand telling him how ready Jesus was to receive him, if he would only come.

And Rube was so changed! As he sat quietly at his books, evenings, there was something about him that made Tom feel that God was near.

Why did he feel so strangely about Rube? The boy was just as merry and loving as of old; he did not preach to Tom; he said very little to him of this change that had come to himself, and yet Tom often found it convenient to remain out of his room till the study bell rang. He made a pretense of hard lessons when Rube tried to talk, but often a single glance at the bright face opposite him brought a sudden rush of tears to his eyes. It was God who was speaking. Poor little Rube was no more impressive than he ever was, but God was with him, and was trying to win Tom's stubborn heart to himself. So gracious and gentle is He to those who are blind and dull and slow of heart.

On this last day of the year a new purpose had come to Tom. He had yielded, though he did not himself know it, as the meeting progressed, and one and then another spoke of God's goodness to him during the year that was closing. A new light came into Tom's dark heart. Yes, he would; he did gladly give himself up to the service of Christ. Henceforth he would follow Jesus; he would belong to him. Could he? might he?

“Yes,” came the answer in his soul, clearly and distinctly. “I have redeemed thee . . . thou art mine.” The light of heaven was shining at last into his soul, and his face glowed with this new-found happiness. He rose in the meeting, and in trembling tones said that before he came there he had determined to begin the new year for Christ. At first his words were hesitating, but when he had fully committed himself his mouth was full of praises.

There were other testimonies to redeeming grace that night, which must have made joy in heaven, among the angels. Several of the students, who, like Tom, had been halting in their choice of this present world or Christ made the great decision that night, and gave their young lives to the service of God. It was a time of joy on earth and in heaven. Teachers and students were moved alike to give thanks unto Him who had graciously come so near. Christian hearts were warmed; they were opened wider for the King of glory to come in and take possession.

Just before twelve they all knelt in silent prayer. The old year with its burdens and cares,

its joys and sorrows, departed with silent footsteps, and the New Year came in while they were kneeling before God.

When the city clocks had struck the hour, Professor Earle in a few tender earnest words of audible prayer committed them all to God's safe keeping for the new year. Then they rose and sang,

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

When the words were finished, such a hand shaking and such hearty greetings as followed were quite enough to reward one for the lateness of the hour.

The next day they all went back into school and began the studies of a new term, as well as a new year. The vacation had rested and refreshed them, so that teachers and pupils returned to the routine of school life with energy and new delight.

Tom as well as Rube pursued his studies with a new purpose. The lives of these two boys were now given to God. They realized, to some extent, that they belonged to him, and they hoped and prayed that he would use them to help their own people.

No one knows better than the young colored men themselves, how great are the needs of their people, but it is one of the blessings of the Gospel of Christ that as soon as it finds its way into a human soul, that soul goes out in yearning after others, to bring them to a knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is this aggressive spirit of Christianity that actuates all missionary enterprises, and that is to bring the world to Christ.

The three years which followed were full of rich experience to Tom and Rube, but we have not time to give their record. Rube spent his summer vacations with his mother, but Tom remained at the school during every holiday. In the long vacations he found work, sometimes outside the school, enough to greatly assist in paying his expenses during the year. He was also very useful about the school, and after the first few months was very much depended upon for responsible work connected with the boarding department.

For the last year he had been looking forward to the prospect of returning to Mississippi to teach, and the thought gave him great pleasure. His preparation was very inadequate, but Professor

Earle encouraged his going, knowing that the standard could be only gradually raised, as the colored youth became better able to maintain it.

Tom's father had gone to Kansas, with the many colored people who left the Mississippi bottoms, to try a new life in the west. He had seemed to be satisfied with Tom's remaining in school and several times a letter written for him to Tom had found its way to Sumner Institute.

Rube was eager to go with Tom, and at last his mother gave a reluctant consent, committing him to Tom's care, as if he were an elder brother. Rube had grown in manliness and self-reliance, and his advancement in study was quite equal to Tom's.

Professor Earle said he had no doubt of his doing good work in school, and the experience he would gain would be of great value to him.

But it was like going from home when the two left Sumner Institute, and it required all the courage and faith that ever inspired a foreign missionary to go into these "regions beyond" and meet the ignorance and superstition of the colored people, on the one hand, and the cruel opposition of the white people on the other.

The young men, however, for such they had now become, were hopeful and enthusiastic about the work before them, though indeed sad to leave the friends who were so dear to them. Youth is always confident, and a blessed enthusiasm carries them through scenes from which more prudent age shrinks and hesitates. And so, though not without misgivings, they went forth hopefully and courageously. Sumner Institute, a home, with all the word represented to them, was behind, and a new chapter in life was opening. They were to meet perils by the way, and rebuffs and even sorrows of which they had not dreamed, but they had health and faith and principle to meet the trials before them.

## CHAPTER VI.

## STARTING OFF.

TOM and Reuben started out for themselves to seek work in the country schools that were opening in Mississippi and elsewhere for the colored people. They had been much to each other in school, and would be mutually helpful in the trials that lay before them. The strength of character and self-reliant nature of Thomas North would be counter-balanced by Rube's refinement and gentleness of nature, which could be firm and very steadfast when occasion required.

These country schools began at an early day to be supplied with teachers from the young people who had been in the various schools of training which had sprung up all over the South, since the war.

Teaching is at present pre-eminently the work of the young colored man and woman who obtains even the rudiments of an education. The whole South-land is open to them. The masses who are

to be lifted up from the depths in which slavery left them as a people can only be reached by their own young men and women who have been prepared for the work. In every Southern state, in every hamlet, and on lowly plantations throughout the whole fair land the ignorant and degraded wait for them ; not always consciously, but always ready to receive them, as though in some way they dimly recognized the power that was to lift them up from the darkness that for ages had so cruelly enshrouded them.

It is given especially to the young colored people to do, because they can go where white teachers can not go, and they can reach people that white teachers can not reach. Their people receive them gladly, grateful that their children are so soon able to open to them the fountains of knowledge.

A Southern planter will often permit a school to be opened on his place for the people employed by him, if taught by a colored teacher, when his instinctive prejudice against the old time "Yankee school-teacher" would lead him to compel the white teacher to retire, by mild or by forcible means. It

calls up unpleasant recollections of the time when his natural enemy sought to undermine the institutions of the South. He may be, and often is heartily glad that the institution is abolished, and accepts the situation so entirely that he is friendly to the colored school, but his preference for the colored teacher to the exclusion of the white is manifest.

In search of schools, Tom and Reuben embarked on a steamer for Callioka Landing.

"The boat reaches the landing a little before midnight. We shall be there in a few minutes ; so be ready."

"But it is so dark, not a light to be seen anywhere, and the rain just pours down. What shall we do ?"

"Do ? why get off, of course. You don't expect to be carried on down the river, I reckon."

Just then the shrill whistle proclaimed the nearness of the landing, and with a heavy thud the boat stopped, while two trunks were tossed ashore and two young men stepped out upon the invisible landing. The light from the boat gleamed out upon them for a moment, and then with a puff

and a groan the little steamer moved off into the darkness.

And such darkness! It shut down upon them, wrapping them about as with a heavy black mantle.

The young men clung to each other almost in fear, as they peered about, but not one glimmer of light appeared, save that on the boat, growing fainter and fainter each moment, as it drifted away, looking like a star that had fallen below the horizon.

And how it rained! A steady pour, with an occasional flash of lightning, and the mutterings of distant thunder.

"Tom, we can't stay here. What shall we do? There must be a freight house or some cabin near that would at least shelter us from this pouring rain."

"But we should tumble into the river trying to find it. I hardly dare stir a step in this darkness, for I don't know where we are. I seem to have lost my bearings entirely, and scarcely know which side the river is."

They found their trunks, and drawing them together, sat down. Rube, the younger one, only a

lad in years, was almost terrified with the darkness and loneliness and the merciless rain.

“Tom, do you reckon we must sit here all night in such a rain?” he questioned, as though his companion could solve the difficulties of the situation if he would only give his mind to it.

“I ’m thinking, Rube, I ’m thinking,” replied Tom.

There was something in his tone that quieted poor Rube, reminding him that he had not been looking upward for help and guidance, but was depending upon dear old Tom.

After a few moments, Tom said, “Don’t lose heart, Rube ; keep your courage up, for there must be some way to do.”

As he spoke, a light shone in the distance, and the heavy splash of a man’s tread fell upon their ears. It was the freight agent’s man who should have been there when the boat arrived, but had now come to see if there had been anything left requiring his attention. The man, an old negro, stumbled slowly toward them.

Tom called to him, and then went a few steps to meet him, bidding Rube sit still on the trunk.

He told the old man that they had come down the river to get schools, and that they had been left by the last boat.

But live freight was not in the old man's line, and he was not disposed to trouble himself in regard to it.

"No room in de freight house, hit's full ob cotton bales, and dar's only one house any whar's nigh. Dat's de Agent's, and 't aint no ways likely he's gwine to take niggers in dar," he gruffly answered.

"But where do you stay?" asked Tom.

"Sleeps on de porch; no room dar for any mo'."

"What shall we do?" questioned the disconsolate Rube.

"Do what other folks do; colored folks allus stays here on de landing, when da gets here at night," replied the old negro, who was tired and cross, and wanted to get to his rest, though his bed was only the porch. He, however, so far relented as to bring some pine knots and had just succeeded in lighting them, when the agent himself appeared.

His house was but a few steps from the landing, and hearing voices, he had come down to see who had arrived. Finding they were only colored boys

he was about to return, when Tom addressed him, begging him if possible to give them some shelter from the rain till morning.

The man stopped, and seemed not indisposed to help them if he could. To be sure, his own comfortable house stood only a few yards distant, where there was room and to spare, indeed. White passengers often found lodging there, but not for one instant did the possibility of receiving these occur to him.

But it was hard on them, in this rain, he thought, as he turned his steps homeward, to get out of the storm.

"I say, boys," he called, "I have an empty house, about half a mile from here. If you can get this old man to show you the way, you can sleep there."

The young men most gratefully accepted the proffered hospitality, and an offer of half a dollar induced the old negro to take the pine torch and show them the way.

He led them away from the river, out into what seemed to be a road. To avoid the deepest mud they kept to the side of the road, stumbling over logs and small brushwood, then going down

shoe-deep into the slimy, slippery soil. Meantime the rain fell steadily and heavily as it can fall only in the Mississippi bottom. The young men trudged on through the darkness, in silence, for the uncertain flickering of the torch made it necessary to give attention to their steps.

Their guide went before them, grumbling and muttering, apparently to himself; but suddenly he came to a halt, saying that the house was just across the ditch, and they might have his pine torch and go on; he could go no farther.

"Ye 'll hev to walk 'cross dat log dar, an' dese yere ole bones ain't spry 'nuff for dat, noways; got too much rheumatiz in 'em now."

The young men reluctantly bade him good night, for they had hoped he would go with them to the deserted house.

Tom took the torch, however, and started bravely across the log, Rube following on behind; but their shoes and clothing were heavy with rain, and the log was slippery and treacherous. Splash! and Tom fell into the ditch.

Fortunately, the torch landed safely on the other side, and flamed up anew, revealing to their sight the longed-for house.

Rube had kept his footing better, and was able to pull Tom up on the right side of the ditch. This tumble dispelled their gloom somewhat, and Rube was able to laugh at his bespattered and dripping friend.

The house presented anything but an inviting aspect, as they groped their way towards it. It was dark and deserted, the door standing partly open, and the rain beating furiously in. They paused just a moment before entering, only a moment, for the storm drove them in.

“How do we know what is here? — a bear, maybe, or a panther,” whispered Rube.

“Oh, hush! We are not such cowards,” Tom replied.

But it might have comforted Rube to know that inwardly his manly friend was quaking with an undefined sort of fear, which, endeavor as he would to shake it off, still crept upon him and almost possessed him.

Tom went forward, however, and throwing his light around the empty room, exclaimed, “There is nothing here, come on.”

It was a square, log house consisting of two

rooms. There were no windows, but the "chinking" was out in many places between the logs, freely admitting the rain and wind. The room was bare, except some cotton sacks containing seed, which lay in one corner. The walls were black with smoke from the open fireplace which yawned at one side of the room.

"Now if we only had something to make a fire with, Tom, it would not be so bad. How wet we are!"

They were indeed so wet that as they stood still surveying their quarters the water ran in little pools and dripped from their clothing.

"No use of talking of fire in this deluge, Rube, even if we could find wood outside, which is doubtful in the darkness."

They were both silent for a moment, then Tom added, "We might look in the other room, there may be something there."

"Yes, but who wants to go poking into any more dark holes?" sighed Rube, and Tom did not seem in haste to explore farther.

They sat down on the cotton sacks, but the discomfort of their wet garments made it impossible

to rest, and the blazing torch which Tom still held in his hand threw lurid shadows into the distant corners of the room. They talked and tried to laugh. What a joke this would be to tell the boys when they got back to school! But there was very little fun in it at present, and both were doleful and uncomfortable. They shrank closer together, and their talk became fitful, until they were quite silent. The torch was burning low. It would soon go out, and much of the night was before them.

Outside, the storm increased. The wind shrieked and moaned among the branches of the trees, which stood close to the cabin, and the rain came in torrents against the house, forcing itself between the logs on every side.

Then, there was the door into the other room. It was closed, and what horror might be concealed there!

Suddenly, Tom rose, and marching straight to the door, gave it a bang with his foot. It yielded readily enough, and Rube coming to his side, the two gazed into the darkness beyond. Holding the torch so that the light could fall, first on

one side, and then the other, they were able to take a good view of the dreadful room.

The only thing that met their eyes was a pile of dry firewood, with splinters and chips scattered around, and a woodman's ax leaning against the wall.

A cry of joy sprang to their lips, and then a ringing laugh at their former fears woke surprised echoes in the deserted cabin. They scanned the room carefully, and then went back to the fireplace in the other room with their arms full of kindlings and wood. It was a hard task to start a fire in so wet a spot, but courage and persistence conquered. At last, after much coaxing and patient waiting, the flames leaped up the old chimney, and cast a cheery glow into the darkest part of the room.

Ah! the blessedness, the cheer and comfort there is in a blazing fire. No wonder there were fire worshipers among the old idolaters. So felt these lonely outcasts, as they gazed into the dancing flames, and then into each other's faces. But to a higher worship their hearts responded, and a fervent, "Thank God!" burst from Tom's lips, while Rube said, "How good He is to us, and I

have been so distrustful, and afraid! I did think several times of that verse which says, 'What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee,' but I did not seem to get it fixed in my mind, so that it stayed."

"Ah, Rube, that is a mighty wise verse, but there is a verse where the trusting comes first. It says, 'I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength.' I confess, I have more frequent use for your verse because the fear generally comes first, and then I remember to trust, but I believe we should please God better if we trusted Him so much that we did not get frightened or troubled."

"But do you think God minds every little thing, and that we ought to pray about everything?"

"Yes, indeed, I do, Rube. I know God minds; he says so. I am sure God wants us to trust him in little things as well as great, but I am very slow to learn."

Rube was thoughtful, but his eyes shone with a hint of tears that he would not shed, and his boyish face was radiant in the firelight.

All their fears were gone, and even their loneliness vanished as they piled high the logs, in a

most lavish manner, and watched the flames wind round them, curling and hissing and laughing at the storm without. The rain was falling more gently now, their garments were drying in the warmth of the fire, and the heat began to make them feel drowsy and to realize how weary they were.

They placed the sacks of cotton seed against the door, for there were no fastenings, and then threw themselves down upon them. The cabin was their castle for the time, and they had no thought of human intrusion, on such a night. They were, however, surrounded by the forest on every side, and wild beasts were not uncommon visitors in that region. Rube's suggestion of a bear or a panther possibly occupying the deserted cabin was not so improbable as it might seem.

But our travelers were not destined to uninterrupted repose, though the hour was so late. They had scarcely ceased talking and were quieted down to sleep, when steps were heard outside the cabin. A heavy knock at the door came like some new evil threatening them. Both young men held their breath for a moment, and looked at

each other. Again came the knock, louder and more peremptory than before, and a voice from outside called,

“Let me in; I want to stop over night.”

“Who are you?” asked Tom.

“I ’m Abe Tucker. Hev jes leff de boat, and de boss down dare at de landing done tole me to come here. Come, let me in sry.”

There seemed to be no other way to do, even had they been indisposed to share their quarters with a fellow-traveler. So, cautiously opening the door, a man was admitted, who glanced gratefully at the fire, and immediately made himself at home.

He was a middle-aged colored man. He had a bundle on his back, which was suspended by means of his walking-stick, which was stuck through the knot in the cloth containing his provision and his small purchases. He explained to the young men that he lived down the river, “a right smart piece;” had just come from Memphis on a later boat than their own, and had been directed to the cabin by the agent’s man.

He had a frank, pleasant, dark face, and there

was something about him that inspired confidence in the minds of the young men. So without misgiving they made the stranger a bed like their own, and once more prepared to rest. The night was far spent, and the gray dawn would soon be upon them. It was not long before all three occupants of the lonely cabin were fast asleep.

## CHAPTER VII.

## HUNTING SCHOOLS.

WHEN the occupants of the cabin woke in the morning, the storm had ceased, and the sun was streaming through the cracks, where the night before the wind and rain had forced their way. Only the smoldering ashes remained in the great fireplace, but the room was dry and comfortable. When the outside door was opened the trees which stood near to the cabin were sparkling with raindrops, and the whole world seemed clothed in freshness and beauty. Life wears such a different aspect in the morning sunshine! We lie down at night with the heaviest grief knocking at our hearts, but when the morning comes it has gone away with the darkness of the night, and we spring up to welcome the brightness of a new day. Surely "joy cometh in the morning," though there may have been weeping which endured for the night.

Tom and Rube in the gladness of the morning forgot the discomforts and forebodings of the night before. Abe Tucker, their fellow lodger, was ready to take his departure, having waked earlier than they, but the young men detained him to ask his advice about looking up schools. They told him they had come from Sumner Institute, where they had been attending school, and had recommendations from the teachers there.

"I was born not forty miles from here, and lived there till a few years ago," added Tom.

"Hi! thought ye was no common niggers. Been up kentry to school, hev ye? Well, we wants teachers mighty bad down here in Mississippi, an I 'm proud to see ye."

The welcome was hearty, and the man's general appearance, on the closer inspection that the daylight gave, increased the confidence already felt by the young men.

"Can you tell us where to apply to get schools, and where we had better go first?" asked Tom.

"Reckon I can. I 'm one ob de trustees in my deestrick, an dar 's two others. I 'll see dem. We ain't got no teachers, an' dar 's right smart many

dat b'longs to our district. No reason why de chillens should n't be in school now, gettin' some larnin', for dar 's no cotton pickin', no nothin' for 'em to be a-doin'. Ye must go fore de superintenden' first and be examined, ye know."

The man gave a keen glance at Tom, as if to assure himself that he was no impostor, who would like to obtain a school in some way out of the regular order.

"Oh, certainly, we expect to be examined, the first thing, of course, and we want you to tell us where to go to find the superintendent."

"All right, I reckoned you wanted to do de squar thing. Dis leetle chap gwine to 'sist ye, I reckon."

He addressed himself to Tom, and seemed to think Rube was too young to be of much account.

"If we can't get two schools and I need an assistant, he will, but he can teach as well as I," replied Tom.

"Well, we 'll see ; but we must be joggin', for we all wants some breakfast.

To their surprise, however, just then a colored man came to the door with a basket containing a

smoking hot breakfast. "De agent done sent it," was all he had to say, as he set the basket down on the cabin floor.

"How strange!" Tom and Rube both exclaimed, while Abe Tucker nodded and smiled, and seated himself to partake of the agent's bounty.

This again showed that although the agent was full of the unreasoning prejudice which forbade his inviting the young men into his house for a night's lodging, he was by no means destitute of human kindness.

After they had heartily partaken of the delicious corn bread and bacon and sweet potatoes, of all of which there was an abundant supply, they went up to the landing where they had left their trunks. The river was greatly swollen by the rain and was foaming madly along, but the banks were green and fresh, the sun shone, and the birds sang. It was a great contrast to the night before, when they sat so disconsolately on their trunks in the darkness and the beating rain and watched the glimmer of light from the boat as it floated down the river.

The agent was pleasant and cheery to them, and

when they offered to pay for their lodging and breakfast, he promptly declined, saying he was glad they had come down to teach school.

“Right smart chances for schools around here.” Then he added, “For my part I’d rather see colored boys teach them, too.”

Prospects were brightening, and the young men were cheerful and very grateful for the encouragement which the morning had brought.

Finding the young men had trunks to carry, Abe Tucker advised them to get some kind of conveyance and go directly to the superintendent, and having made arrangements with him, to come to his cabin for the night. He himself went on ahead. Later in the day the old man who had guided their uncertain footsteps to the cabin consented to take his “mule and team,” and carry them a few miles down the river, as far as the superintendent’s, at least, and if his good-nature held out, perhaps he would take them on to Abe Tucker’s.

It was a slow, perilous ride. The river had not yet broken its banks, though every one constantly feared that it would do so. The fall of rain had

been so heavy that the road was for the most part under water. The country was low and flat, and it was easy to see how readily it could be submerged. Every little stream was swollen till it was almost a river, and went rushing on till it reached the mighty flood. There were several of these to be forded in their drive, and the water came into the old wagon box on each occasion. When once out of the streams, the water lay so deep that the old mule constantly stumbled over unseen stumps and snags that lay in the way. Here and there were cattle standing knee-deep in the water, and lowing mournfully as if for help. The fields were covered with water, the corn and swamp grass waving above it.

Finally, the "mule and team" stopped in front of a very unpretending log house, the front part of which seemed to be occupied as a country store. It was also the post office and the headquarters of the country superintendent, whose duty it was to examine applicants for schools and to assign the work of successful candidates. Five or six other log cabins could be seen at varying distances; a blacksmith's shop stood behind the store, and a

cotton gin, with sheds for storing cotton, was not far distant. About half a mile up the road was an old weather-stained church occupied by the colored people. There were patches of corn lying in various directions from the store, and vast cotton fields stretched away to the right and the left, as one stood facing the river.

Some men were lounging on the front steps of the store, who saluted old Sam, as he was called, and then stared at the young men, in a manner that showed the keenest interest.

“Who ’s this ye ’ve brung, Sam?” said one of the men, a tall lank Mississippian, with keen gray eyes, which were overshadowed by very heavy eyebrows.

“Teachers for de colored folkse,” replied Sam, with an air of great importance.

Then turning to the young men, who did not seem to understand that this was their place of destination, he said, “Can’t ye light?” and “light” they did.

However proud the old man was of the distinction of bringing them to the superintendent and introducing them as teachers, he did not intend to

show them any particular civility. They were only boys in his estimation, and too much attention might not be good for them, for Sam's experiences in life had been varied, and ignorant though he was of "book learning" he was a keen observer.

The young men respectfully inquired for the county superintendent, and were told that he was not there, had gone down the river, and might be back in a day or two, then again, he might not.

One of the men to whom Tom had addressed himself, answered in a rough, good-natured way, but another one who had not yet spoken, and who sat tilted back against the wall, looked them both over keenly, and then rising with a gesture of contempt, and an oath on his lips, walked up to Rube and deliberately sent a volley of tobacco juice over him.

A deep flush of anger rose to the boy's delicate face, but Tom's hand was laid upon his arm, just in time to keep back words that would only have brought them into deeper trouble. They had been warned of just this treatment, and Tom's self-possession did not forsake him enough to permit him to resent the insult as he longed to do.

"We will come again, when Mr. Conner is in," he said, as they both turned about and started out of the store.

"How I hate those dressed-up niggers, and white ones at that," the man of tobacco juice said.

And well he might, for their neat, gentlemanly appearance reflected unfavorably upon his own unshorn and unkempt person.

Old Sam had hitched his mule under a tree not far distant, and had intended to "drop round among de folkses a leetle," as he said; but he saw the insult offered to Rube, and with a quick loyalty to his race was ready to aid the young men if he could not defend them.

He accordingly advised them to get into the wagon, and he would drive them down to Abe Tucker's and see what could be done.

There was nothing to be done except to wait the return of the superintendent, but meantime they were glad of the offered shelter for the night.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE TUCKERS.

ABE TUCKER lived about a mile from the store, on what was known as the old Tucker place. Before the war, Ezra Tucker, Abe's former master, owned a large plantation here with hundreds of slaves to work it. His cotton fields stretched far down the river, below the great bend, and he was known as one of the largest cotton dealers in the South. He was one of the strongest advocates of secession in the state, and staked all his wealth in the full expectation of seeing a confederacy established, whose foundation stone should be the enslavement of a race. But with the failure of his hopes for the confederacy, all his great possessions were swept away, and he died soon after the close of the war.

His vast estate was divided when it passed into other hands, but one of the purchasers, at least, held so much of the land that his plantation

was still considered very large even for that region.

Abe Tucker leased a few acres of the new owner, raising cotton principally, and also corn and potatoes enough for family use. The store was owned by the proprietor, from whom he leased the land, and Abe was obliged to trade there on credit, paying when the cotton was sold. He could not read or keep his own accounts, so that the store-keeper had things all his own way. When Abe came to settle he generally found, to his surprise and disappointment, that he had taken up his whole crop before it was gathered, and more frequently than otherwise he came out in debt, in spite of all his economy and care, for he was frugal and careful. Nor was his wife wasteful and improvident, as the colored people are generally supposed to be, and as many doubtless are. It was simply an impossible problem upon which they were at work. It was a discouraging life, but Abe possessed the patience of his race, which has so often been called cowardice by those who can not appreciate its surroundings. Only patience and courage and hope, of which God has given the black man a

large share, can carry him through the transition period from bondage to a complete recognition of all his rights as a free citizen.

Each year Abe hoped for better times, but was as often disappointed. This year the floods were likely to ruin his crop, so that he might comfort himself with the thought that the proprietor would get less than usual. Small comfort in this, however, when he looked at his large and growing family.

Their cabin stood a little back from the road, with a cornfield in front. A winding path, shaded by the tall, waving corn led up to the door. The water had found its way here, as everywhere, but the land seemed to lie a little higher, and the corn was not so deep in the water.

Abe met old Sam and the young men when they stopped in the road in front of the cabin. With true hospitality, he bade them "light and hitch," assisting the young men in carrying the trunks into the house, and urging old Sam to come in and get some supper.

Mrs. Tucker was standing in the open doorway and received them with a motherly interest. She

was not a large woman, but as she stood with arms akimbo, she seemed very broad and round. Her feet were bare, and she wore a coarse linsey dress. Her crisp, African hair was partially concealed under a bright colored handkerchief, which was twisted deftly round her head, something like an Eastern turban. Her face was dark but beaming with good-nature, and one was certain of finding a mellowness of heart, which was like a well spring of kindness, beneath the unattractive exterior.

The little Tuckers came trooping in, having been dodging about among the corn stalks when the strangers were coming up the path to the door. They were soon re-enforced by two dogs, and the chickens peeped cautiously in at the back door. Sally, the eldest of the Tucker children, was completely overcome with shyness and retreated to the other room, but the boys and the dogs remained to make the acquaintance of their guests.

The cabin consisted of two rooms, with the most meager and humble furnishings possible in a home. In the first room which they had entered was the usual open fireplace, where all the household cooking was done. In one corner were shelves, on

which were arranged a few dishes, mostly cracked and broken. There were a few chairs, cooking utensils, a large chest, and a bed. Under the bed was a trundle bed, which was drawn out at night and in which several of the children were disposed of when bedtime came

The front and the back doors were exactly opposite each other, giving an opportunity for a cool breeze to stray through the little cabin, even on the hottest days. From the back door one caught glimpses of wide stretching fields of living green, on which the golden sunshine rested in summer splendor, while nearer the cabin the silken tassels of yellow corn waved and nodded in the air, as if rejoicing in the heat which followed the rain.

Humble as the little cabin was, with its many indications of poverty, yet it was home-like in a sense that many a rich and beautiful house is not.

Tom and Rube felt that they were in an atmosphere of kindness and good will. Abe Tucker's heart was large, and both he and his wife received the young men as if they were committed to their especial charge. Not that they reasoned about God's providences, but like simple-minded chil-

dren of the Lord they accepted day by day what he gave them. In his loving kindness God had graciously prepared this humble home, where these young men would find a place of refuge from the opposition and prejudice which they were sure to encounter.

Tom and Rube began talking to the children, who were likely to be the pupils of one of them. Jake and Andy and little Pete, short, stubby little fellows, all of them, with glittering black eyes, that seemed to be taking in the young men most thoroughly, were deciding with a child's quick eager intuition which of "dem dar stuck-up fellers" would make the best teacher, for their father had told them the business of the young men before their arrival. They were rather divided in opinion, Jake being greatly taken with Rube's fair face, while Andy and Pete were equally impressed with Tom's imposing strength.

They answered Tom's questions with only a nod or a shake of the head, and the most solemn faces — one, two and three fingers going into their mouths, as they became more and more embarrassed. They seldom saw strangers, and neither black nor white

men often entered their cabin, who were dressed "so fine" as these.

The finery of the young men consisted principally of well blacked boots, well trimmed and neatly combed hair, and, yes, — they wore white collars, — but their clothing was worn and almost shabby. The influences which had been about them for the last few years, however, had necessarily given them a certain refinement, which made them differ from the ordinary colored man, and perhaps from the ordinary white man of this region.

Meantime Mrs. Tucker began to bustle about, on hospitable thoughts intent. Sally was summoned from her retirement, and when she and her mother had disappeared for a few moments the shrill and prolonged shriek of a doomed fowl smote upon the ears of the guests. Other preparations followed; and soon the little cabin was filled with delicious odors, foretelling coming events, which were gratefully welcome to Tom and Rube, for it had been a long and trying day since they partook of the agent's hospitality in the morning.

Old Sam had departed, much as he was inclined to stay. He knew he should have a long drive

home, and should be late reaching there. The sun had gone down, and the shadows of night were creeping up to the little house when they sat down to supper.

The table had little to boast of in the way of furnishings, but it was clean, and the food was excellent. The fried chicken was crisp and brown, the potatoes were sweet, and the golden blocks of corn bread were such as are seldom seen in the North-land — egg bread, it is called in its perfection. Only a southern cook can make it, and only Mississippi corn can furnish the proper material.

Mr. Tucker told the young men not to be in haste; they were welcome to stay at his house till they found schools, and his wife's kindness assured them of her welcome. Through her skillful management a comfortable bed was provided for them in the other room — a bed on the floor to be sure, but rest was sweet to them, and they were young and strong.

The next day they again went to see the superintendent, only to find that he had not returned, and the next day there was the same disappointment. Nearly a week passed before he came and the required examination was held.

In this, however, they were successful, both obtaining first-class certificates. But things move slowly in southern latitudes, and it was several days before schools were assigned to them. At last the school in the Tucker district was secured for Tom, much to Mr. Tucker's satisfaction, and one for Rube a few miles distant. Tom would board at the Tuckers, an arrangement which was mutually gratifying, for their kindly interest had made him quite at home with the family, and it was an advantage to the Tuckers to board the teacher.

After a thorough search in the neighborhood, a bedstead was procured. A packing box from the store served as a table, and Mrs. Tucker found a white cloth to cover it. Tom put up a shelf for the few books he had brought. They spared one chair from the family room, and his trunk served for another, if needed.

The rough puncheon floor was clean. The window was merely a square opening cut into the wall of the cabin, with a board on leathern hinges, which could be closed in a storm or severe cold, but the sweet odors of the growing fields and distant woods came in at the open window.

Here Tom was established for his term of school, and Mr. Tucker took Rube over to Salem Centre, where he was to teach. His school was to open on Monday, the same day that Tom's began, and he was anxious to go to the place at once, in order to become somewhat acquainted with the people before entering upon school work.

Tom was a little troubled at Rube's going so entirely among strangers, but it was a necessity, and Rube was cheerful and happy at the thought of the work before him. So, on Thursday, Mr. Tucker took him to his boarding place at Salem Centre, where they all hoped he would soon be as pleasantly at home as Tom was at the Tucker's.

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE SCHOOL IN THE CHURCH.

TOM's school was begun in the little Methodist church, which stood dangerously near the river's edge. On the side towards the store was a corn-field, where the "second growth" was just putting forth its silken tassels ; and on the other side, the cotton-fields stretched away, as far as the eye could reach. The church stood facing the road, though several rods back. Across the public highway were only uncultivated fields, partly cleared, with unsightly stumps and blackened trees marring the beauty with which nature always clothes herself. Beyond this clearing was the forest of tall cotton-wood, elm, and maple, standing dark and heavy against the sky.

Behind the church ran the river, wide and treacherous, but fascinating to one who watched its course, as it wound gracefully on its way. The angry roar with which it now rushed along might

well disturb the occupants of the church, but sometimes it was peaceful enough to verify the Scripture likeness, where God's peace is said to be "as a river" as it flows through the soul.

However well a church may be adapted to purposes of public worship, it can never be a convenient schoolroom. Possibly Tom was less aware of this fact than he would have been had he been more experienced in teaching. Certainly it was with a good degree of courage and enthusiasm that he saw the children gather on his first Monday morning in school. It was past planting time and before cotton picking, so that the older boys and girls, as well as the little ones, came. How they filed into the old church on that first morning!

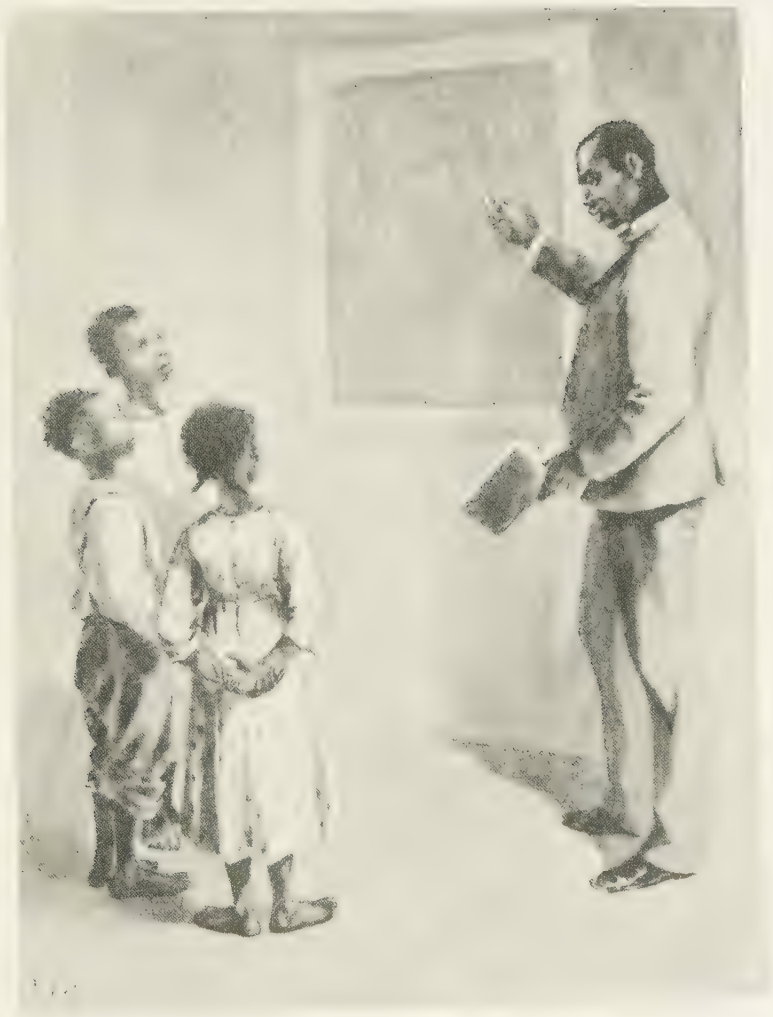
Tom was almost dismayed when he saw how many there were, of all ages and sizes, and all colors too, for variety is always very noticeable in a so-called colored school. There were rude, boisterous boys, who showed by their manner of entering the room that there was work ahead for the young teacher; but there were also quiet, earnest faces among them. Mischievous and rollicking, sober and sedate, they were all there; timid little

girls, with clean linsey dresses, stole softly in, and took seats near the door; but other girls, neither timid, little, nor clean, came also. To all alike Tom must put forth his hand, like the great Master whom he sought to follow, and strive to lift them up into a higher life.

It was new work to him to organize the school and grade the pupils properly; but he was patient and untiring, besides being gifted with a good degree of tact and common sense, which served him instead of experience. There were almost as many different text-books as pupils, and when, later, he tried to show the parents the necessity of some uniformity in this respect, they were entirely unable to see why one book was not as good as another. Some rather broadly hinted that he was trying to shirk his duties, when they found he wanted to arrange the scholars into classes.

"I wants my chillen to read by their selves," he was often told, and in despair he gave up the attempt to grade the school as it should be done.

Fortunately, he had profited by the experience of other student teachers from Professor Earle's school, and had brought the means by which he could



"HE PLACED LESSONS ON THE BLACKBOARD FOR THE LITTLE ONES."



make his own blackboard, and his trunk contained two boxes of crayon which were treasures to him and a source of wonder and delight to his pupils. He placed lessons on the blackboard for the little ones, and thus obtained a uniformity for them, in the way of reading, notwithstanding the protests of their parents.

The superintendent came to his aid by insisting upon every pupil's possessing a slate and pencil. He even instructed the "storekeeper" to send to Memphis for a supply, that there need be no excuse for any pupil being destitute of this much-needed accessory.

Thus seconded, it was very easy to inspire a fresh interest in the minds of the pupils in all the branches of study pursued. There was soon an ambition among them all to acquire neatness and accuracy in writing. Problems in arithmetic could be much more readily solved on a clean, new slate, and sentences were corrected and rewritten again and again, until there seemed a fair prospect of some degree of proficiency being acquired in the much-abused English language.

After two or three weeks of hard work, our

young teacher was fairly at home in the old church, and his pupils were arranged in so many classes that he was fully occupied from eight in the morning till six at night. Let no one who believes in modern views of education, stagger at the number of hours taught; for it is a fact, in the rural district schools of the South, that no teacher is considered faithful, or that he is doing honest work, who does not occupy himself as many hours in the day as the common laborer does. Why not? the people ask. Is he not employed and paid fair wages, to work? and why should he have so many more hours to himself than any one else?

In a few instances the teachers are bold enough to object, and to insist upon fewer hours in the schoolroom; but the majority of teachers hold their pupils all the long, weary day, not thinking it prudent to send them home until the sun has gone down. The wiser and more experienced teachers give frequent recesses to the little ones, during the day, and possibly prolong the noon hour, but even then they make a long day for their pupils and for themselves, and do not accomplish as much as they could in fewer hours.

There had been heavy rains in the "bottoms" for many weeks before Tom and Rube arrived at the Landing. The rain continued to fall, with only short intervals, and the river had been steadily rising. On Sunday of the third week of Tom's school the rain fell all day, not softly, like the warm summer rains that make the grass and the buds and blossoms spring forth, but a fierce, beating rain. The wind blew and torrents shot madly into the river; the rain burrowed holes in the earth and opened new channels to the already swollen and frenzied torrent. There was an almost constant rolling of heaven's artillery, and the lightning's flash seemed like the angry sword of an avenger. The storm raged all night long, and in the morning, though there was a lull, the clouds were heavy, and the gray, sullen sky still looked threatening.

There was a chill and a gloom over all the earth, as Tom looked forth from the door of the Tucker cabin. The water covered the road and the surrounding fields for great distances, though he could not tell to what depth.

Abe Tucker had been out all night, and others

were watching and anxious — filled with the great fear of a break in the banks, that dwellers on the mighty river must always have in time of storm and flood.

After breakfast, Tom, with some difficulty, made his way to the church. He hardly expected any pupils, but thought best to present himself there. The storm had prevented any meeting being held the day before, and during the night the water had crept above the doorstep. It was still rising ; steadily and stealthily creeping in at every crevice of the old church.

He found something to climb upon, and looking in at the window saw that the water covered the floor to a depth of two or three inches. With a soft, gurgling sound, it forced its way between the old timbers and the foundation stones ; it trickled down from weak places in the plastering, and pressed heavily against the door, where the largest quantity of water entered. The poor old church was invaded by a relentless and persistent foe.

With dismay, Tom leaped down, and ran to “Connors’” where the men were already gathered in anxious knots, discussing the rain, and estimat-

ing the probable rise of water the night before. All wore troubled faces.

The inundation of the church did not disturb them greatly, so absorbed were they in the dangers that threatened their homes. The growing crops were likely to be ruined and much of the stock be swept away — if no greater calamity befell them.

Finding Mr. Conner, Tom repeated the story of the flooding of the church to him.

Mr. Conner said, "Of course your school must be suspended till the water falls."

"How long is it likely to be?"

"I can't tell anything about it. It may be for a month, as the storm is not over, and there will be a much greater rise before we are through with it. Besides, the levee may break. Look, how high the river is! That always makes me anxious. I have seen cattle and houses, yes, and families swept away more than once since I have lived in this bottom."

"I wonder people stay here," said Tom.

"Well, the land is rich. It is like the valley of the Nile, the overflow only enriches it. People are just fools enough, after one danger is past, to be

willing to risk it again for the sake of the profit. After these overflows the land just laughs with fatness, and anything that grows anywhere under the sun can be raised here. But it is a mighty bad business while the rise lasts. I'll see what can be done about your school, in a day or two. Possibly the water will go down sooner than I expect. Just now I must go and see what is to be done about my cattle. They are in a lot down there where the water is at least knee-deep."

Tom offered his assistance, and joined the men, who were doing what they could to secure the cattle.

- The poor dumb creatures were driven in droves, larger or smaller as they could be managed, several miles back from the river, where the land was somewhat higher, and was not yet under water.

Tom worked all day with a vigor and strength which was admired by the men whom he accompanied. Not many of them had his physical strength and the perfect health which sent the young blood bounding through his veins as he battled with the elements. There had scarcely been a dry thread in his clothing all day, but returning late in the after-

noon, after he had partaken of a hot supper, he insisted upon taking Abe's place in the watch that had to be kept again that night.

During the evening the rain ceased, and the stars shone out, faintly at first, and often entirely obscured by the passing clouds that flitted over the face of the sky.

Tom made several journeys up and down the river's edge that bordered Abe Tucker's land, and in the distance could discern the moving figures of other watchers keeping guard against the treacherous river. But all was well. The solemn night wore on, and no alarm was given of breakage anywhere, or of any indication that the waters were likely to burst their boundaries and rush forth to devastate the land.

As the morning dawn crept slowly up from the East, faintly tinging the dull, gray sky with rosy hues, Abe Tucker came from the cabin and joined Tom. A fervent "Thank God" came from his lips, as he saw that the danger of the night was passed. He said he believed the worst was over, though careful watching would be necessary for several days and nights.

Tom returned to the cabin, went softly to his room, for the family were not yet awake, and threw himself upon his bed. He was soon in the sound dreamless slumber that comes when nature is thoroughly exhausted.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE SCHOOL IN THE CABIN.

TOM's school was sadly interrupted by the flood. For a few days he was fully occupied, assisting Mr. Tucker and others in guarding against the destruction of their property. He took his turn at night as watchman on the levees as long as there was fear of inundation, and his active services in the day won the approval and respect of the people.

But he was anxious to return to his school, and supposed this would be possible as soon as the water subsided. It had fallen, after a few days, sufficiently to warrant re-opening. But though the children were able to attend, there was, alas, no place in which to gather them. The church could not be occupied for a long time, for after the water had disappeared, the building dried very slowly, the sun through the high windows scarcely reaching the farthest corners.

Tom was almost in despair over his work, but finally prevailed upon a man who was building a cabin to let the room already finished for the temporary use of the school. It was a log cabin, standing a little higher up than the level on which most of the houses were built. One room had been made habitable, and a woman with her two children had just moved in to occupy it until the entire house was finished. She consented, for a consideration, to go and stay with a neighbor till the church could be occupied again. Her belongings, however, must remain stacked up in a corner for safe keeping. These, which were her sole earthly possessions, and therefore valuable to her, consisted of two wash tubs, a barrel, a bedstead, two chairs and a table, all of which were to be stored as compactly as possible in the little school-room.

Temporary seats had to be provided, and for this purpose stumps of logs were sawed off and brought in, which served as rests for boards. The boards were loaned, after much reluctance on the part of the owners, and these formed the seats for fifty-seven pupils. Tom did all the labor connected

with the preparation of the room, and the removal of the school, with the help of some of his pupils. They were quite as desirous to return to school as their teacher.

When the room was at last ready, Tom surveyed it with some degree of satisfaction; but in the morning when the children came, crowding into every available place, he saw difficulties before him which he had not encountered in the old church.

The room was small, with no windows, only open spaces in the logs, which were to be boarded up when it rained. The puncheon floor was not yet worn smooth, so that splinters from it were constantly getting into the children's bare feet, causing not only suffering for the poor little victims, but a great deal of disturbance to the tranquillity of the school. When it did not rain, there were men at work on the unfinished part of the house, whose hammering and loud-voiced conversation were very distracting to Tom, and quite diverting to his pupils, who had not learned to hold their minds to one thing in spite of outside influences.

The sun seldom shone, though once in a while a

golden gleam fell across the rude floor, touching the bare toes and creeping up to the dusky little faces of the pupils, as they thumbed the pages of the old blue-backed speller, or drew pictures of their own devising on the much prized slates. But more frequently it rained, often so hard that the door was closed and boards placed against the open places where the windows ought to be.

Then it was so dark that mischief ran riot among the younger children, and sometimes the older ones too. Not paper balls, but bits of corn-cob flew mysteriously about, and it could never be certainly known from whence they proceeded. Yells of pain or rage occasionally came from the dim, shadowy corners, and it would be found that under the friendly cover of darkness some one was paying off an old score.

Jesse Taylor was one of the oldest boys in school; a dark, heavy-faced boy, of about sixteen years of age. He had never been in school before, and had never been brought under any influences that were at all elevating in their character. At first he did not like Tom; then he began to regard him with a kind of admiration, mingled with a

superstitious awe because he could do so many things and because he "knew such a heap." Dull and stupid as he was, he recognized his teacher's superiority, but the dormant soul was not yet sufficiently aroused to lead him to long after the same good. Only God's touch upon his soul could do that. Only One could awaken him to a sense of his need of the higher knowledge which was the secret of Tom's power over him. For, unconsciously to himself, this young man brought to his pupils something more than the mere instruction which he so faithfully gave them. His own acquaintance with God, his dependence upon him, and God's presence with him—these were the sources of his power, though unrealized by himself.

Jesse had lived in an atmosphere of superstition all his life, and no wonderful or terrible tale could be told that he would not readily believe. Soon after they moved into the cabin he began to notice that no matter how clean the floor was the night before, in the morning there were fine chips and sawdust strewn in the region of his seat.

Tom was his own janitor, and did his work with great neatness and care, always remaining after

school to sweep and dust his schoolroom. When Jesse spoke to him about the condition of the floor, he was annoyed, thinking the boys had entered the room in his absence and carelessly scattered the chips.

When, however, he spoke to the school concerning the matter, all the pupils seemed very innocent in regard to it, and the next morning and the next, the offense was repeated. Whatever precautions Tom might take to secure the room against intruders, every morning there was the same evidence that some one was entirely disregarding his wishes and commands. At last, determined that he must and would discover the offender who so persistently defied his authority, he spent the night in the cabin, and observed an inoffensive little mouse at work most industriously, just under Jesse Taylor's seat. The floor was so rough that he had failed to notice the nibbling that had been going on so long.

The next morning he announced to the school the discovery he had made, and there was much laughing and merriment over the little culprit, who had so long evaded the vigilance of the teacher.

Jesse, however, did not laugh. He had altogether different views on the subject from those entertained by the school at large. He had been suspicious of the teacher from the first, and when day after day the same thing was repeated in spite of all Mr. North's fine words, the conviction grew in the mind of the superstitious black boy that it was a charm used by the teacher for purposes of his own. That the chips should be found under his seat, and nowhere else, made it certain that Mr. North was his enemy, and was trying to exercise some wicked and perhaps fatal influence over him.

The teacher's apparent annoyance and sharp reproof of a supposed offender confirmed this belief. As to the story of the mouse, of course that was all a lie. And so poor Jesse's admiration was changed to scorn and fear and intense dislike. He was too much afraid of his supposed enemy to make any outward demonstration of his feelings, but only mused over them in sullen silence. He dropped a quiet hint to some of the boys, but received so little encouragement from them that he kept his suspicions mostly to himself. Every

other pupil in school was too loyal to Mr. North to be willing to listen to anything of the kind, and Jesse wisely refrained from imparting his views, after the first attempt.

At one time he resolved to leave school, and absented himself for a number of days. But there was a charm of quite a different nature from that which he had deluded himself into believing that his teacher exercised. It was the charm of personal influence, the charm of a disinterested desire to do his pupils good, and this was slowly but surely working upon the ignorant boy.

After a time he came back to school, and said no more of his suspicions.

He still had no confidence in Mr. North, but his teacher did not know it. He had never suspected what was passing in the boy's mind. He only knew he was not reaching Jesse Taylor as he wished he might, and felt rather sadly that he was not doing much for him. Not till long afterward did he know that the boy had accused him of putting a spell upon him.

But amidst all the disadvantages of situation and surroundings, Tom had much to encourage him.

The children were making good advancement in their studies, considering the circumstances. Many of them were as eager to learn as ever he had been, and this made it easier to be patient. It seemed an unspeakable privilege to open fountains of knowledge to these, who like himself had so long thirsted for them, and it was a great delight to see them drinking even at the little rills that he was able to open to them.

## CHAPTER XI.

## SABBATH SCHOOL.

THE colored people held services in the church, where the school was conducted, but there was no Sabbath school in connection with it. Tom had moved slowly in the matter of organizing one, hoping to draw in some of the older church members to assist him. But they were slow to accept what they considered his newfangled notions. On the Sabbath that the flood began, however, an appointment had been made to meet both parents and children, and a beginning would have been made in the way of Sabbath-school work. Then came the interruption of removing the school to temporary quarters, and it was a disappointment to Tom that the opportunity for renewing the appointment was so long delayed.

As week after week passed, and he found himself obliged to remain in the cabin, he decided to invite his pupils to meet him there on Sabbath

morning. All services in the church had been suspended since the flood, and the circuit preacher, who came only once a month, at any time, had not been there since the school opened.

On Saturday, Tom swept the little room, adjusted the seats, and made it as inviting as the circumstances would permit. The windows and the door stood wide open, and as if to smile upon the effort, the sun shone in splendor on that day, filling the little cabin with brightness. The trees glittered with raindrops, which had fallen the night before, and birds of brilliant plumage flitted about among the branches or dropped on the grass near the door of the cabin, and then soared away pouring out an ecstasy of song, as they went.

When it was known that Mr. North was going to hold a Sabbath school in the cabin, the parents as well as children were ready to attend. It was appointed at ten o'clock, but life is everywhere so easy in the South, that little cognizance is taken of time. This is said to be true in all warm climates. A traveler in South America says: "An appointment for five o'clock to-day sharp, may mean six or perhaps sometime to-morrow."

There is no rush and hurry in those warm latitudes. There is plenty of time for everything; there is nothing of the stir and tingle, the briskness and alertness that is in the very atmosphere of a colder clime. Hence, this leisurely way of taking things is perhaps not so peculiar to the colored people, as to the climate, but it is certainly almost impossible for them to be promptly on hand at an appointed hour.

It was long past ten o'clock, but no one came. Tom took his little Bible, and sat down on the doorstep, disquieted at his undertaking, for he had never before attempted a religious service, unaided by older and more experienced persons. Strange, that no one should come, he thought. After all, perhaps he was not called to do this work, whispered the tempter, who always presents himself if he fears any good is to be accomplished.

Tom had sincerely feared he was neglecting his duty in not starting the Sabbath school earlier, but he had all the time had a shrinking from the work it would impose. He turned the pages of his Bible, as he sat waiting, and here and there read a verse that brought strength and comfort,

and a renewed assurance that this was what Jesus would have him do. He would do what he could in His name, and leave the results with God. Thus Satan for that time was vanquished.

Looking up suddenly he saw little Joe Perkins standing before him, clean and smart for Sunday. He stood with his hands in his pockets, his hat pushed back on his curly head, and his round eyes coolly surveying his teacher. Tom had been so intent on his own thoughts that he did not observe him as he came up to the door.

"Why Joe, I did not know you were there!" he said, and was answered by a peal of boyish laughter.

"Hi! done catch de teacher, dat time, Sim!" he called, and another woolly head peered round the corner of the house, and others, till half a dozen boys joined the hilarious Joe.

All the little Tucker boys were there, in force — Jake and Andy and Pete, who claimed the teacher as their special property, because, "He done stopped at our house."

"Dad an' mam an' all de folks comin'," said Eddie Sanders.

"Well, it is time they were here," replied the teacher, who was accustomed to the promptness of Sumner Institute, and had forgotten the slow, easy-going ways of the country.

"Reckon we better go home and start em," suggested Sim, at which they all sped like the wind, and were far off before Tom had time to object.

Soon four or five little girls, led by Sally Tucker, came, but shyly refused to enter the cabin yet, because it was so early.

"Dad's comin' fore long," one of them said.

It was nearly twelve, and Tom was almost in despair, resolving, however, to go inside the cabin and begin to sing. This drew the children who were lingering about, and as he sang one and another and yet another song from the little book that he drew from his pocket, the children came in, and took their accustomed seats.

Then he sang the songs which they used in day school — the sweet, Sabbath-school hymns that unconsciously to the child teach of heaven and of Christ. The children joined in the music until presently the little room was filled with song. The old woods so near the house took up the echo, and the birds sang in delightful chorus.

Then the teacher offered a short, reverent prayer — drawing near to God as his Father and imploring his blessing upon the school. A chapter from the Bible was read, and then they sang again.

How they did sing now ! Their sweet, childish voices rang out on the still air, and occasionally a deeper tone from outside tried to catch the strain.

Now came the difficulty of actual teaching. They had no Bibles, no Testaments, and no lesson quarterlies. And, alas, if they had, not half of the children could read. Necessity, however, devises new ways for the inexperienced, and the young teacher used his precious blackboard, making it serve his purpose in Bible teaching as in other studies which his pupils pursued. Turning toward the school the side that had been hidden against the wall, neatly printed words were revealed, covering the whole board.

“ If ye love ME, keep my Commandments.”

“ Come unto ME and I will give you Rest.”

“ Suffer the Little Children to come unto ME, and forbid them not : for of such is the Kingdom of God.”

Verse followed verse from the holy Word, and these Tom read and explained, and then required the school to repeat after him in concert.

After they had learned to read them, a few moments were given to study, and then hands were raised by those who could say them. Thus more than an hour was spent, and then the teacher distributed Sabbath-school papers.

This was an unexpected pleasure. The papers were those he had himself received as a pupil at Sumner Institute. The students there who taught were accustomed, after reading and enjoying their papers themselves, to lay them carefully away until they went to the country, that they might give them to their own Sabbath-school pupils. Thus the papers did double duty, and never could they be appreciated more deeply than they were by these ignorant little country children, who had never in their wildest dreams seen anything half so beautiful. The papers did not look old and soiled, for Tom was very neat and orderly in all that belonged to him. Any child likes a clean, fresh paper better than one that shows hard usage.

And they were beautiful. The charming pictures that embellished each one were in themselves an educating influence to the child, who would spend

many a long hour gazing at them, and studying them over, even if he could not read the accompanying stories. A very audible murmur of admiration, very nearly approaching a shout, was raised by Tom's little flock, as the papers were passed from one to another. This was more than they expected, and many a grateful, loving glance was cast toward their teacher.

While Tom was teaching the verses and distributing the papers, he was aware of a constant increase in his audience, though the people came in very quietly. When he had finished, he saw that the little room was crowded, and men and women were standing around under the trees outside, some talking in a low tone, but nearly all listening respectfully and earnestly.

He was about to sing a closing hymn, when his eye fell upon the elder portion of his audience, who were listening so attentively. The tears sprang to his eyes, and his dark face was full of strong emotion. He remembered how compassionate the Saviour was toward men thus situated and how he addressed them as sheep having no shepherd. How needy these people were! How few

of them could read for themselves from the Word of God, the record of his Son, Jesus Christ!

Stepping to the door of the little cabin, he said: "My friends, would you like to have me read to you from the Bible? I am not a preacher, as you know, but I will read to you if you would enjoy it."

"Yes, yes, do read," came eagerly from many voices, and they all pressed closer up to the door.

There were now about as many people outside as within the house, women with little children clinging to their skirts, and others in their arms, and men whose toil-worn faces brightened as if sure of a message of good news for them. A few young men and women had come, possibly for no better reason than to see what the school-teacher was going to do. But they were not disposed to disturb the exercises of the Sunday school, and when the reading was proposed came nearer with the others. Surely, a hungry, needy group of listeners!

Tom read from the Gospels the wondrous story of Christ's sufferings and death on the cross, the old, yet ever new story of redeeming love. Then he turned to the tender, loving words of farewell

as recorded by John. He made no attempt at explanation. The words were clear enough in themselves, and no comment was necessary. He simply read on, in a clear impressive voice, reading slowly and distinctly, chapter after chapter, for more than an hour. There were occasional responses from the people, such as "Yes, yes, my Lord;" "I done tole ye, my Lord bore de cross;" "Tank ye, tank ye, Jesus, my Lord," with similiar exclamations from time to time. The story had a vivid reality to them, and many of them had probably never before heard it in its purity and simplicity, just as it is found in the Word of God.

The gospel, like anything else, becomes distorted, if not obscure and unmeaning, when it is handed about by "word of mouth," and in this way, in former times, the colored people have received it. Not being able to read for themselves, they more frequently relied upon what some one else, as ignorant as themselves, had heard the preacher read, accompanied sometimes by strange and distorted interpretations. It is not singular, therefore, that their ideas of the gospel and also of a religious ex-

perience necessary to salvation are often extravagant and unreal.

When Tom had finished reading, he called upon an old man present to lead in prayer. It was an earnest prayer, though the words were broken and the language such as furnishes the heedless and unthinking a fund of amusement, but its tender pathos, its pleading spirit, ascend more surely and quickly to the ear of God than many more conventional prayers.

Then a hymn was sung, and the Sabbath school was dismissed.

The children were perhaps weary before the reading was ended, but were quiet and went out softly, as if something of the solemnity of the holy words had fallen upon them. There were many invocations of blessing upon the young teacher, from the older people, whose faces were beaming with happiness which the reading had brought to them.

## CHAPTER XII.

## SALEM CENTRE.

RUBE's school was ten miles back from the river, not directly, for no roads are direct in this part of Mississippi. More frequently there are no roads at all, only gateways, through unused fields and long stretches of unfenced pasture, or rough wagon tracks through the woods. It seems to be making a public highway of private property, but no one objects. Owners of land are always obliging in this respect, only requiring gates to be closed, if gates there are. Sometimes the bars of a low rail-fence are let down, and wagons pass through, the driver usually carefully replacing them again, and so no harm is done. There are roads, of course, built by the public, for the public, but they are zigzag windings rather than the wide, straight roads that mark the lines of travel in many parts of the country.

In consequence of this obliging manner of open-

ing roads almost anywhere, there were several ways from the river, any one of which led to Salem Centre, where Rube's school was situated.

A town had once been laid out here, but the attempt to build it up had proved a miserable failure. With all the dangers that the dwellers by the river experienced, they were loath to leave it, just as in all parts of the world those who live by any great body of water become so attached to it that the inland town or country is very dull to them.

The town was a very straggling village. At one time it was expected that a railroad would run through the place and build it up, by making it easier to get their cotton and other produce to market, but this prospect failed, and since then it had had a struggle for existence. There was little business and no enterprise. Those who settled there expecting to obtain work from the railroad were living in great poverty, having no apparent opportunity to better their condition, if they had possessed the necessary energy and ambition. Others, in rather better circumstances, had come, hoping to see more lively times when the place became a cotton shipping depot.

At one time there were three stores in the place, where everything was sold, from a hairpin to the most approved plow. Groceries of all sorts and whisky were sold. When business prospects became dull, because of the failure of the railroad scheme, two of the stores closed, but in a few days opened anew as saloons, where any kind of intoxicating drink in which the jovial Mississippian wished to indulge could be obtained. The remaining store continued to sell everything, but did not relinquish its inalienable right to include whisky. Salem Centre had the reputation, in all the adjoining towns, as a place where more whisky was drunk than anywhere else in the state.

There were two churches in the place. The white people had a Methodist church, and the colored people a Baptist church, and both were tolerably well attended. It is to be feared, however, that in the colored church, at least, there was very little of the gospel preached. Rev. John Stokes, the preacher, could not rebuke sin with any degree of effectiveness, because his life did not correspond with the principles of the gospel. The people went to hear him preach because they loved an

excitement of any kind, and no other offered itself ; but the older and more serious part of his congregation had very little confidence in him. He was a man of some ability and possessed a rude eloquence that wrought very powerfully upon his hearers, and many of the more susceptible or more unthinking greatly admired him.

There are not so many places of influence open for a young colored man of ability as there are for the same class of white men, and hence it is possible that more frequently a bad man whose natural gifts lift him above his fellow-men gets into the pulpit. He seeks the place not because he is bad, but because he is ambitious, and there is no other opening for him of equal influence and importance. He has no idea of his moral unfitness, partly because he has never taken the initial step toward better things, and partly because the moral tone of society about him is so low.

Rube opened his school at Salem Centre promptly at the appointed time. He had not suffered from any interruptions. The colored people had a schoolhouse here, which they had built themselves. It was not a log house either, for a wonder, but a

square, frame building, having windows with glass in them, a luxury not often indulged in in these parts, especially by the colored people. The schoolhouse stood out in the glaring sun, in a small open lot, with no shade trees or anything lovely growing near it. It had another disadvantage, in that it was too near the saloons, where loungers might be seen and heard at all times of the day.

A school had been held there for several terms, by student teachers from different training schools for colored teachers. There were, in consequence, advantages in the way of text-books and other conveniences, which Tom had not found.

It was not a very large school and consisted almost entirely of little children. There were a few older girls, but the larger boys of the place had come under the evil influences that saloons are sure to exert, and so cared very little for opportunities of education.

Rube very soon won his way to the hearts of his pupils, and was perhaps more generally popular than Tom would have been under the same circumstances. Tom's apparent strength of character

would have seemed best adapted to this more difficult place, but his manliness and physical strength might have challenged resistance. Rube, however, was regarded as a very pleasant boy, who had decided notions of his own, to be sure, but who could do no one any great harm.

He had not been at Salem Centre long, before he felt that his mission among that people was to lift up his voice against strong drink. Every one seemed to be given to intemperance. In the homes of his pupils, the old people showed their respect for the young master by offering him something to drink, and when he declined, they stared at him in wonder, or jeered at his fine notions.

"Mighty fine, dat dar boy tink hisself; too proud to take ary drop wid us pore folkses," Uncle Tobe announced as he sat tilted back in his chair at the grocery.

Then followed a discussion of the teacher's merits. Some thought he had a good school, "kose de chillen seem getting on right smart in da learnin'," but all agreed that he was "mighty sot up wid book learnin', and did n't know good whisky when 't was set before his eyes."

With the children Rube had more influence, and by every means in his power he tried to make them hate strong drink as he did. As was natural, this decided stand against so prevalent an evil aroused a certain antagonism, which could easily have amounted to serious or even violent opposition. But Rube had such a frank, genial way of meeting people, and manifested such a sincere interest in everybody that he disarmed many of their hostility, and led them to wonder if he was not "mighty nigh right after all."

On two or three different occasions he attempted to hold a temperance meeting, hoping to be able to talk to the people together and interest them on the subject, but in this he was steadily opposed by Mr. Stokes, who had personal reasons for not desiring to have the liquor question agitated among his people.

Mr. Stokes went about privately, warning the people against Rube, telling them that he denied the Scriptures, as was evident when he made out that good whisky was harmful, and that he had been set up by attending school, getting "book learning" and white people's notions, when he

really did not know anything about real religion.

These arguments had their influence, but not to the extent that Mr. Stokes could have desired. It would not have been strange if he had been able to fan into a flame the smoldering prejudice and opposition that already existed, but God's care was over the boy and no harm came near him.

The people found that they had a good school; the children were devoted to their teacher, and children hold stronger sway in every household than we are apt to consider. Then, too, when Rube's bright, handsome face appeared among them, like a gleam of sunshine, their hearts warmed toward him. He made himself so entirely at home in their cabins, eating with them whenever invited to share their humble meals, and sitting down with them to listen patiently and respectfully to their long stories, that he completely won most of their hearts.

He could not do much in the way of Sunday-school work. A Sabbath school already existed in the colored church, and Mr. Stokes managed it in his own way. Rube gathered a class of boys who had not attended before, and it would have been

difficult to refuse him the honor of teaching them. But he had very little opportunity to meet the people in any public way. This may have been as well for him, for he was young, and God used him in more direct personal efforts for others. He was very faithful in the schoolroom, and was always sure of a welcome in the cabins, when he carried his Bible and proposed to read to the people. He chose the time when he found them least occupied, and often had the whole family and perhaps some near neighbor listening in close attention to every word. He read the more simple parts of the Bible, the Gospels seeming to be most easily comprehended, and many a devout soul was comforted by his ministrations. The Word of God always finds eager listeners among the colored people. It is to them such a remarkable thing that they should hear anything from the Book itself, just what Jesus said. It comes to them with a directness and a power that is not felt by those who all their lives have been accustomed to its reading.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE SCHOOL IN THE CHURCH AGAIN.

TOM taught in the little log cabin four weeks. He, as well as the children, had become very much at home there. He had been so busy, and so interested in his work, that he forgot the discomforts which at first seemed so great. The children were more easily controlled, as they came to know and love their teacher better, so that the annoying things which had troubled him were less frequent now. And Tom was happy with the children about him. Teaching was not drudgery to him. He threw his whole soul into it, and intensely enjoyed it. His pupils in turn partook of his enthusiasm, as far as they were able, and were making rapid strides in more things than textbooks.

The tall, old trees about the cabin made a delightful shade on hot days, and the birds had become so familiar with the presence of the children

that they saucily perched on the branches close by and sang their sweetest and loudest when the classes were reciting.

But when the dampness had disappeared from the old church to such a degree that it was safe to return, neither teacher nor pupils were sorry to quit their close quarters; for though they had been able to adapt themselves to their circumstances they were unquestionably crowded and uncomfortable in the cabin. The water no longer covered the roads and the fields, but the ravages of the flood were felt in the injury of the present crops. The enrichment of the soil that would follow promised better things, but at present the prospect was very discouraging. There had been no serious breakages on the levees, for they were carefully watched in the time of danger, and repaired as soon as the first leakage appeared, but so long as the heavy rains continued the low lands were flooded. As the season advanced, the rains were less frequent, and the water found its way to the river through the numberless creeks and gullies that threaded the land.

Once more Tom and his little flock found them-

selves established in the old brown church. There was still some dampness clinging to the walls and a smell of mold not altogether pleasant, but this would disappear in time.

The house was once a place of worship for the white people, but since the war, like many other equally dilapidated possessions, it had become the property of the colored people.

There were very few white people now in this region. The vicissitudes of war had widely scattered them, and those who remained were not people who cared greatly for sanctuary privileges.

The church had never made any pretensions to architectural style, and now, old and weather-beaten, it presented a most neglected appearance on the outside, and a dreary, barn-like aspect within. A smoky old stove had for generations blackened the walls and the rough, unhewn timbers, while the windows, small and high, were shaded with what seemed the dust of ages. It seemed more unsightly and darker than ever when Tom returned to it, after the freedom of sunshine and air which the cabin afforded in clear weather.

There were tall, high-backed pews, with old-

fashioned doors, which gave a more stately appearance as a church, but were exceedingly inconvenient in a schoolroom. All the pupils except the tallest were hidden from the teacher's eye, when the doors were closed, and they were dark unpleasant places for study, to say nothing of the temptation to do everything except study within their inclosure. But again the young teacher adapted himself to his circumstances as well as he was able to do and his work of instruction went on.

Since the opening of his Sabbath school the older people had taken a greater interest in the school. Indeed, the schoolmaster had become a person of great importance among them. It was a marvel to many, that he, one of themselves, should be able to tower so far above them, for Tom's superiority was generally acknowledged. The term "book-learning" was sometimes applied with contempt by those who had not had the advantages of schools. Some young people had thus spoken of it, who had little knowledge of practical life. But Tom became universally respected. His plain, practical common sense com-

mended him to the people. That was something they could understand and appreciate.

His physical ability and willingness to help them in time of danger was not forgotten. Mr. Conner, the superintendent, as well as others, had regarded him with marked favor ever since he worked so heroically to help them protect their property from the devouring flood.

The old people now attended his Sabbath school as regularly as did the children. If one of them chanced to be absent, a reason for it was sure to be sent to Tom during the following week. They had probably caught this idea from his insisting upon an excuse in case of a child's absence from day school. The Bible readings after Sabbath school continued to interest, and were frequently varied by short, simple expositions.

There were some, an increasingly smaller number, who doubted his real, heartfelt piety, because he could not say that in his religious experience he had been literally and truly "down to hell" and then transported to heaven's glory, where he received the crown of life. This only was orthodox religion in the minds of many colored people,

but they were very apt to make exceptions in regard to those in whom they had a growing confidence, as in the case of Tom. In these cases their theories in theology probably remained the same, but their hearts went ahead of their heads.

“Ye don’ know nothin’ bout ’ligion, honey,” even Mrs. Abe Tucker said to Tom, in the first talk they had on the subject. “White folkses ’ligion, boy, ye hev got dat sure, an’ dat’s no ’count. I hev known ’em in my young days, fore de war, white folks bout here who could sing and pray right smart, but dat’s all.”

Tom did not know how to answer her, but it did not trouble him in the least, and in his quiet way he went on and lived so much like a Christian that Mrs. Tucker was forced to acknowledge that he did seem like “one ob de Lord’s own.” “He has de mark ob de Lamb in his forehead, shore,” she remarked to her husband on one occasion.

Abe Tucker had his own views on the subject. He was more intelligent than the average colored man, who has had no kind of opportunities for culture or development, and he was very decided in believing Tom to be thoroughly and genuinely

one of the Lord's own, whatever his religious experiences may or may not have been. His respect for the teacher had increased with his acquaintance with him, and he always rejoiced that he had been brought to his door, when he first came among them.

It was certain, however, that whatever their elders thought, the children were sure of their teacher's Christian character, with the swift and unerring intuitions of childhood.

Pretty Sally Tucker, a bright young girl of twelve, came home from Sabbath school one day and told her mother that she was "living for Jesus now."

"What ye mean by dat, chile?" her mother asked sharply.

"Jes mean, I 'se a Christian gal now. I 'se given my heart to Jesus, and now I feel every day he's so close to me that I would not do a bad thing, nor nary thing that would make him sorry, nor would not be pleasin' to him."

The mother looked at the girl incredulously, but there was something in the sweet, subdued face so unlike her saucy wayward Sally, that she instinctively withheld the words that rose to her lips.

It would have been well for her if she could have thought of the little child whom Jesus "set in the midst of them." Perhaps she had some such suggestion in her mind, for she was a good woman, though untaught and ignorant of many things. Many, alas, wiser than she, are not careful to take heed lest they "despise one of these little ones," who are so precious in the Saviour's sight.

Mrs. Tucker watched the child closely, not hoping to see something wrong, for her own heart would not permit that, but she wondered and pondered the matter over. She was a Christian woman, according to her light, but she could not read the Word for herself, and had all her life listened to distorted views of Christian doctrine, either from colored preachers as ignorant as herself, or from white preachers who inculcated in the mind of the slave, at the expense of all others, one doctrine, namely — "obedience to masters." It was also true, that in certain communities of colored people, there is often little respect for "white folks' religion," and little effort to conceal a contempt for it. Tom well remembered Miss Whately's amused look, when once in a meeting, at Sumner Institute,

Eddie Willard said, "Why, I did never till I came here know that white folks were Christians. Nary one down in Arkansas says anything about it." When Mrs. Tucker spoke slightly of white folks' religion, he told her of his beloved teachers, who had taught him the way to Christ.

"Da's from de Norf, I reckon," she replied.

"Yes."

"Dat 's it, I tells ye. Da's mighty curus sort of white folks, I allus hern tell. But, mebbe, da gets inter de kingdom at last. I don' know. Spects de Lord knows 'em." Blessed assurance that! "The Lord knoweth them that are his."

CHAPTER XIV.

“AUNT ESTHER.”

DEAR old Aunt Esther and Tom could talk together of spiritual things with a keen appreciation of the experiences that each had to relate to the other. It was the “same Spirit” that drew together the heart of the quiet, reticent young man, who was always shy of speaking to any one of his own inward life, and that of the joyous old saint, who had passed through all the ups and downs of religious experience required by the orthodox colored church members. But Aunt Esther bore the “mark in the forehead,” if ever any of God’s children did. Such a sweet, spiritual face was hers, often radiant, always bearing the impress of heaven! It was easy to believe that she had very direct communion with God.

She was very small and slight in figure, very erect, and very swift in all her movements. Her hair was perfectly white, drawn back and fastened

in a close knot, when freshly combed, but lay in little ripples and waves all over her head, the front locks straying and curling about her face in a pretty, girlish fashion. Her soft, brown eyes, rich olive complexion, and delicate features showed that in her youth she must have possessed great beauty. Her brow was still smooth and peaceful, the storms that had passed over her head having left no visible sign upon her face. She was probably more than sixty years of age, but her deep spiritual nature with its heavenly peace had impressed itself upon her face and enabled her to retain much of her youthful beauty. Communion with God and familiarity with heavenly things show themselves upon the human countenance more than we are apt to consider.

Aunt Esther lived alone in a house on the old Tucker plantation. A few acres of the old place still belonged to a member of the Tucker family, a nephew of Ezra Tucker, and this house stood upon his property. Aunt Esther lived in it, rent free, and her other wants were provided for from time to time by Richard Tucker, or "young Master," as Aunt Esther called him. He was very

good to her, all the people acknowledged, and if she was not able to work, she never suffered from want.

Very little of her early history was known, but she had been a servant in the Tucker family for many years. Her children were all born there — yes, and sold from there, all of them. It was said that they were sold in a financial panic, and then the poor creature's mind lost its balance for a time.

After two or three years she apparently regained her mental powers entirely, but she seemed to have no realization that her children had gone from her. They lived in an invisible world about her, played in her cabin while she worked and sang, sat down with her at the table when she ate, and were reproved or caressed by her as they merited.

And they never grew old. A blessed infatuation, one might say, for they seemed to be given back to her in perpetual youth. Little Hepsy was always just seven years old; she never grew to womanhood. Her older brother Alfred was just nine for evermore, a happy, fun-loving boy, and the

baby Willis, scarcely three, always a laughing, toddling little rogue.

In every other respect Aunt Esther seemed fully possessed of her reason. She was active and industrious, her trim little figure flitting about her house, always engaged in some useful work. She was shrewd, intelligent, and capable, and her services were sought in sickness, or any trouble, by both colored and white families far and near, every one feeling there was no one like Aunt Esther. Her faithful and skillful care was considered invaluable in serious illness. She always went to nurse the sick, when sent for. But after she became weary with nights of watching, she grew restless about the children at home. Whenever she began to talk about Alfred and Hepsy and the baby, saying that they had no supper because their old mammy was gone, then the friends of the sick whom she was nursing knew that it would be impossible to keep her longer. They invariably carried her home tenderly, and looked after her wants.

After resting, she was herself again, and ready to go back. With untiring skill, she would nurse the sick one back to life, or if death came, no one

could minister to the last hours of the sufferer so tenderly, or point the dying one more surely to Jesus. This she could do, because she knew the way to Him herself, and knew that he waits to receive every penitent one.

Then, when all was over in the sick-room, who could minister so gently and so wisely to the bereaved ones as dear Aunt Esther, or who with such reverent, loving touch, perform the last sad offices that the dead require?

Tom was greatly drawn to her from the first time he met her, and as their acquaintance ripened his admiration and love for her increased. He did not at first know of the strange fancy in regard to her children. People did not talk about it; it was something sacred in their eyes. It is possible that an earlier knowledge of this might have given him less confidence in her judgment, but before he had heard of the invisible children who were her care she had completely won his heart. He had never been able to tell any one much of his inner life; he could not lay his heart bare as some can to every chance questioner.

Professor Earle knew more of his experiences

and heart struggles than any one else. Tom had felt ever since he knew him that Professor Earle was dearer to him than any one on earth, except his father, and he was not always sure of this exception. Professor Earle certainly made a good investment when he persuaded Jacob North to part with his son and give him opportunities for an education. The personal returns that he received in affection and devotion were something, but better far than that were the rich promises of future usefulness that he saw in the boy.

Aunt Esther unconsciously drew the boy to her, as strong, spiritual natures are apt to do. Tom's nature could respond to much in hers that had always been beyond the comprehension of those with whom she came in contact.

She had learned to read when a child, another proof that she must have been a favorite servant, and probably held what was considered a superior position. This knowledge had been a blessed boon to her, for in some way she had long ago come into possession of a Bible, and she had read it so thoroughly that the precious truths were not only familiar to her, but they were as her daily food from which she drew her life.

She would never read to other people, having an idea that it would be placing herself above them, but she and Tom had very delightful communings over the Word of God. He was a young disciple, and gladly sat at her feet, while she taught him of Divine things. “The entrance of Thy Word giveth light,” and the light of God had shone into Aunt Esther’s heart, making her wise in the deep things of God. Nothing draws human hearts so closely together as sympathy in spiritual things. Aunt Esther became to Tom so much of an oracle that her fancies and visions had to him a certain reality. Even the little phantom children seemed real to him.

He went to her cabin one evening after supper, taking his Bible in his hand, as was his custom, for they often read a chapter together, over which Aunt Esther would talk in her wonderful way.

Her house was nearly a mile from Abe Tucker’s, and the walk through the woods was restful after the weariness of school. It was situated in a deep forest of old moss-grown trees. The swinging, gray moss drooped to the ground, from the tall branches of the large cottonwood trees, swaying

back and forth, in the gentle breeze, and seeming like huge arms stretched out to meet him. Only faint rays of the setting sun glanced through the shadows that were already gathering in the woods, though occasionally to the west a bit of brilliant color flamed up in his pathway as he went along.

Aunt Esther was sitting on the doorstep, singing to herself, as Tom drew near. She did not notice him at first, but kept crooning over one of the soft, sweet songs of her people, known as "spirituals."

O Lord, O my good Lord !  
Keep me from sinking down,  
I look up yonder, and what do I see ?  
Keep me from sinking down.  
I see the angels beckoning to me,  
Keep me from sinking down.

Her voice was low and tender, and very sad, and her eyes had a far-off troubled look. Aunt Esther was tired, and she was always sad when she was weary. As soon as she saw Tom the singing ceased, and she came forward with a cordial greeting.

"Sit down, honey," she said. "Let me bring

a chair out under the trees, and I 'll sit on the steps, long o' the chillen. They are powerful uneasy to-night. Can't keep 'em quiet. Alfred could n't eat no supper, so tuck after a rabbit, and now they are all gone chasin' it. See it!”

Sure enough, as Tom looked, the bright shining eyes of a little gray rabbit peered out from the grass. It did not seem timid, or shy, as if chased by the little ghostly children, but gentle and friendly, as though knowing and loving the harmless old woman from whose hand it fed. A weird, uncanny feeling stole over Tom, sitting there under the trees, with the swaying moss about him, the shadows deepening in the more distant wood, and the invisible children chasing the innocent rabbit. Tom did not understand it, but a shadow of superstition was stealing over him. They soon got into a conversation, however, and the strange feeling wore off. He still could not prevent a little shiver running over him, every time she called Alfred from tormenting the rabbit, or bade Hepsy “come an' sit side o' mammy, for you 'se all tuckered out.”

After a while, the children seemed to vanish for

a little. Their presence was always more apparent when Aunt Esther was weary, as she was to-night, but Tom's coming seemed to rest her. Sometimes it appeared as though she had adopted him in the place of the lost Alfred, and loved him accordingly; for the little children seldom remained about her long after he came.

They were both silent for a few moments, and then Aunt Esther said,

“Jes last night, honey, I was a-sitting here a-thinking 'bout my blessed Lord, when sudden-like an angel came, an' says, ‘Esther child, come wid me.’ Then he led me over a deep river, jes a-walkin over it, as de Master did, when he was in de world. We came to a steep bank, but I could not climb up, till a hand was reached over to help me. De hand was bleedin', an' had a deep wound in it, an' when I saw his face I knew it was de Master sure nuff. Sech a bright, young, lovin' face! wid long shinin' hair down on both sides. Oh, how lovin'-like he looked at me! He put up dat same hand, all bleedin' an' wounded, to wipe away de tears dat allus gets into dese yere old eyes. Den de angel dat brung me from home came wid a long

white robe, an golden slippers for me, an' set 'fore me a table wid plenty ob milk an honey.”

Aunt Esther paused, and a wistful look dimmed the radiance of her face, but when she began again, her voice had the same silvery, joyous ring, that was so peculiar to her. Her voice was one of her charms. Its tones were so rich and full of cadence, and possessed a sweetness and sympathy that went at once to the heart of the listener.

She sat on the step, — framed in the doorway — her soft, white hair curling about her face, and her hands crossed on her knees, as she swayed back and forth.

“My Master came again,” she resumed, and he said, ‘Go back to earth one more time, my chile ; yer work ’s not done finished yet ;’ an’ so I could not stay at home dat time.”

Here she paused again, and a silence fell upon her and upon her listener.

In a few moments Tom rose to go, and bade his old friend good night. The shadows had deepened into darkness now, but he knew the path well and went slowly down into the solemn stillness. The

gray moss still waved about him, almost wrapping him in its folds, as he paused for a moment, thinking he heard a footstep behind him. It was nothing but his disturbed fancy. There was no noise but the sighing of the branches above his head as they gently swayed in the wind.

He lay awake a long time that night, pondering over the wonderful visions that were given to Aunt Esther. Other people might tell him remarkable stories of heaven and of hell without making much impression upon him, but Aunt Esther was not like other people. How glorious it must be, he thought, to have the Master himself thus come to one! Plain and practical as Tom was, he yet had the fervid imagination of his race. The soul of poetry was within him, and it had been stirred by Aunt Esther's fancies and visions.

## CHAPTER XV.

## RUBE'S SICKNESS.

WHEN Rube went to Salem Centre, it was with the understanding that he was to return to Mr. Tucker's as often as possible. He had a cordial invitation from the whole family to come once in two weeks, if he could leave his school that often. Mrs. Tucker's motherly heart had gone out to the fair-faced boy so much that if he had remained with them he would have been her favorite, rather than the staid Tom.

Mr. Tucker's preference was decidedly for Tom as a teacher, but he felt an interest in Rube, and would have been glad to welcome him to his home as often as he chose to come. He knew that he would find himself in a rough neighborhood with very little that would be pleasant to him in his surroundings.

Rube did not expect to visit his friends very frequently, but was rather disappointed that in the

two months and more that were already past, he had only been able to go over to the Landing once, and Tom had never visited Salem Centre. Rube found it more difficult to get a mule to ride than he had supposed. There was no other way to go, except to walk, and he was not strong enough for that. He had never been strong since he came to Mississippi. From the first, he had felt a languor which was hard to shake off. An occasional chill with fever following showed the effects of the climate upon him.

He had been teaching three weeks when he visited Tom. He was very enthusiastic over his school, and told his friends of his efforts in the temperance cause, and what he hoped to do in the future. He said very little about his discomforts until he and Tom had retired for the night to the cozy and comfortable "other room," which Mrs. Tucker had made so neat and home-like for Tom's use.

Poor Rube slept in a room with three boys of the family with which he boarded. One of them shared his bed. The other two lay on the floor. They were rude, disorderly boys. One of them was older

than Rube and all of them were quarrelsome and altogether disagreeable. They generally came home late at night, and frequently had been drinking. Then the noise and disturbance lasted until well into the small hours of the night. At first they greatly disliked Rube for what they called his fine airs, but he was gradually getting an influence over them, and they were less troublesome, though still far from agreeable.

Tom promised Rube to return the visit very soon, but the floods and the care of his school prevented. He would have enjoyed nothing better than to walk over and back, but in that case he should be absent from his Sabbath school, which was not to be thought of. So the weeks went by, and the promised visit was not made, nor had they heard from Rube since his visit. Tom finally arranged to go over one Friday night, riding Mr. Tucker's best mule, that he might return on Saturday.

Mrs. Tucker was anxious about Rube, in her kindly heart. "He may be sick. I'm feared he is, for dat boy don' forget his frien's dis yere way," she remarked to her husband, who hesitated about sparing the mule.

And Rube was sick. The terrible Mississippi chills had laid fast hold on him, and he was too frail long to resist their power. As yet, he had lost only two or three days out of school, but the effort to do his work, when he was really not able to do it, was rapidly reducing his strength. He was advised to "wear out the chills," as it is commonly supposed one may do, but, as is generally the case, the chills gained on him every day in the wearing out process. It was only because his brave soul refused to submit, that he had kept up so long.

When the chill came on in school, he would wrap himself in a large coat and shake it out, in his chair, going on with his school duties as usual; but when the burning fever laid its hand upon him, he had to stretch himself on a bench, and lie down for an hour or more, before he was able to lift his head. And oh, the pain and confusion and suffering in his head, when the fever had its way! The children all loved him and there was nothing they would not do for him, if it lay in their power. It was a marvel how quiet they were when they knew that "teacher done got his chill."

But oh, how the slightest noise increased the pain in the throbbing temples! How loud and harsh and discordant their voices sounded, even though he knew they were trying to speak softly! Dear little things! they did not intend to make the least noise.

When he was obliged to lie down Maida Sawyer in a quiet, womanly way took his seat at the desk, and with uplifted finger hushed the school to silence, pointing to the teacher, and exhorting all to quiet study. Then it was silent.

A mouse that had its home behind the teacher's desk often came out and played about the floor, undisturbed by any fling or insult, though roguish eyes watched his pranks and nimble feet were longing to chase him.

The turning of the leaves of the books, and the pencil strokes on the slates, were almost the only sounds in the room, and many a little pupil yielded to the drowsiness that was sure to come over him, and fell asleep, leaning his head against the wall, or stretching himself out upon the floor. Poor Rube lying there, his head throbbing with pain, and his tongue parched with thirst, wondered if

it was wrong for the children to go to sleep when they ought to be studying.

At first, the chills came only every other day. Then on the days when he was not sick, Rube worked with redoubled energy, as if to atone for the time lost on the chill days. Longer lessons were given, and every effort was made that the pupils should not suffer from his inability to do the work of each day. But courage and energy and determination avail nothing against the deadly Mississippi chills. The low, wet lands are full of miasma and death to those unaccustomed to the climate, and it is not a healthy region even to those who have always lived there.

Tom arrived long after dark, on Friday night. He did not know the way well, and had stumbled along in the woods, going two or three miles farther than was necessary. Rube was asleep, and they did not disturb him when Tom came.

Mrs. Scraggs told him, "Mr. Strong is mighty bad wid chills. Seems to have a sight of misery in his head, an' is powerful weak."

Mrs. Scraggs was the woman with whom Rube boarded. She did not receive Tom very gracious-

ly, but when he told her that he wished to spend the night, and expected to pay for his lodging, she said he could sleep with Rube, as all her boys had gone off down the river, and were not expected home for several days.

Rube was still sleeping when Tom entered the room. The tallow candle only dimly lighted the small, dingy place, but when the light fell upon the face of the sleeper, Tom was startled to see how changed it was.

Rube moaned in his sleep, and turned uneasily. Tom sat down on the side of the bed, and took his hand.

At this, Rube suddenly opened his eyes and stared at him, almost wildly.

“How are you, old boy?” was Tom’s greeting. “You did not expect to see me to-night, did you?”

For a moment Rube continued to stare, and then realizing that it was indeed Tom, he threw his arms around his neck and sobbed like a child. Weak and ill as he was, and bravely as he had borne his sufferings, the sight of his old friend brought back all his longing for home and for his

mother, which he had courageously repressed during the past weeks of illness and loneliness. Under such circumstances, a boy of Rube's age can suffer a great deal from genuine home-sickness, which if it is not a dangerous illness, is very hard to bear. Rube had a mother who had always cared for him very tenderly both in sickness and in health, and he missed her and longed for her, in this the first time he had ever been among entire strangers, more than he could express. The rough ways of the people with whom he lived, the coarse fare, and hard work in the care of his school, and his anxieties and efforts for the general good of the people were all as new to him as to any other tenderly nurtured boy.

The hardest of all had been the effort that it cost him to work when the fever was upon him. This had worn most upon his system, and enabled the disease to fasten itself more firmly.

Tom felt very awkward in the presence of Rube's tears, and hardly knew what to do. Under such circumstances, girls would have a good cry together, which is the most sensible proceeding possible. Tom tried to joke and laugh, which was

entirely a pretense, but it soothed and comforted Rube just to think that it was, "sure enough," his own old Tom. It was hard to pretend to be cheerful when Tom looked into the thin face, with the dark eyes seeming larger than ever, and saw how panting and exhausted Rube was from the excitement of his coming.

As soon as he could, Tom lay down by his side, but it was very late before either of them closed their eyes in sleep. Tom slept late, and was glad to see that Rube was still resting quietly. The breakfast presented little that was tempting to the appetite of an invalid. There was fried bacon swimming in fat; corn bread warm, but hard and unpalatable; tea flat and insipid, with no milk. Jeff Scraggs did not keep a cow, and to buy milk was unheard of.

Mrs. Scraggs was a tall, dark, slatternly woman, unpleasant to the last degree in personal appearance, and coarse in speech and manner. She took her bitters regularly in the morning and evening, declaring her stomach called for it, and one might suspect the same need was ministered to at other times, from the frequency with which the black jug was replenished.

Tom found himself mentally comparing her with Mrs. Tucker, who was always neat and cleanly in her person, and had a certain kindliness of manner that always made pleasant her intercourse with others. Her clean and cheerful rooms, too, came up before him as he looked about at the dirt and disorder that prevailed everywhere in and around the house. Three children played on the floor — such uncared for little ones! Their harsh little voices were quarrelsome and noisy, so quickly do little children catch the tone of those about them, and lose the sweetness from their tones and from their faces.

Poor Rube! thought Tom, what a hard place he has had, and how uncomplaining he has been! Rube had not told him of this dreadful home, when he was over at the Landing. Tom knew that Rube's home was quite different from anything he himself had known before he went to Sumner Institute, for he had seen Mrs. Strong, and knew how much of a lady she was.

It was Saturday, and Rube's "chill day." It came on earlier than usual, and the fever was very high. Tom sat by him all day, doing what he

could for him, which was little enough, evidently. He could not leave Rube that day, and he was trying to think what should be done. He reproached himself that he had not known anything of him for so long. What would Mrs. Strong and Professor Earle think? for he promised them that he would take care of Rube. But he could honestly say he had no thought of neglecting him. Reuben was like a brother to him. But Tom's great heart was very sore and troubled about him.

All day long, the sick boy tossed on his bed, with flushed face and hot hands, sometimes calling for his mother to lay her hands on his head—"just one time, mammy dear." When the fever was highest he did not recognize Tom, but as it abated he watched him gratefully, as he saw him going about the room, doing little things for him.

"Don't leave me again, Tom," he begged.

And Tom answered, "I shall not leave you Rube, mind that."

No doctor could be procured in that region for any money, and Rube had been dosed by every old woman in the neighborhood. So he had had a new prescription each time he had a fresh attack of fever, but all were alike unsuccessful.

When the sun went down and the shadows were creeping into the little room, Rube felt so much better that his hopefulness returned, and he began to talk of Tom's going to Sabbath school with him on Sunday. Tom sighed as he thought of his own Sabbath school, which he had unexpectedly left, unprovided for, but he was resolved to take Rube back with him, and in order to do this it would be necessary to start Sunday morning. He could not be absent from his own school on Monday, nor should he dare to take Rube on his chill day.

It might be a doubtful experiment to take him at all, but he could not leave him there, so uncared for, and so sick.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## GOING BACK.

THAT night, when Rube had rested a little while after the exhaustion of the fever, Tom talked with him about giving up his school for the present, and going over to the Landing with him to be nursed up

At first Rube stoutly resisted the idea. Not to go back into school! "Why, Tom, I could not give that up!"

"Just for a little while, till you are all right again. Mrs. Tucker or Aunt Esther could take good care of you, and good care is what you have not had. Maybe you will be better soon, and then you can return and finish your school. You certainly can not go on this way."

Tom was so like an elder brother to Rube that he was accustomed to take advice from him, and besides he was too weak and sick to care very greatly. He had sometimes wished he could give

up, but to have some one else say that he must relieved him of personal responsibility, and how *could* he let Tom go away and leave him there again?

So it was decided, and Rube closed his eyes, lying very still for some time. He may have been wondering if he should ever return to his school, and if the children would miss him greatly. But after a time he grew quite gay, as they talked of his riding the "best mule," while Tom was to walk very slowly, so that he might not get ahead.

The next morning Tom went early to see the principal trustee of the school, and inform him that Mr. Strong could not go on with the school at present. If he recovered sufficiently, he would return and complete the term.

Mr. Jones was very considerate — gave him an order on the county treasurer for the two months already taught, and hoped Mr. Strong would be able to return.

"He has taught a good school, and we should like the little chap again if he gets well. Plucky, too, to keep right on with the shakes!"

It was a four miles' ride to Mr. Jones', but the

mule felt in better humor than when they started in the morning, and Tom was back at Rube's boarding place before nine o'clock.

In his absence, Rube had been anxious over a new difficulty that presented itself. He had paid his board in advance, for a few weeks, when he began his school; but now he had no money, and was in debt for his board. The treasury made no advances on salary, and Tom had discovered that treasury "warrants," with which teachers were paid, were often heavily discounted.

Mr. Scraggs seemed to appreciate the situation, and was very obliging in regard to it; but Mrs. Scraggs muttered something about the hard work it was to take folks to feed and lodge. Tom had a few dollars in his pocket which he gave her, promising her she should not lose what Rube was owing her.

At last they started. Rube was excited, sad, and joyous, by turns. He wanted to go to the Sabbath school to bid his pupils good-by, but Tom would not listen to it, knowing that the ride would tax the invalid's waning strength to the utmost. His great anxiety was to get him safely away.

Mr. Scraggs pointed out a better road to Tom than the one by which he came ; a road that lay mostly through the woods, and which was so narrow that the thick boughs of the trees, much of the way, met overhead and interlaced, making a soft, green canopy above them, which entirely protected them from the sun.

They went slowly, for the shadowy coolness of the way was restful to Rube. Such cool, deep shadows as lay across their pathway and stretched back into the woods, till they were lost in the darkness ! Occasionally, a golden gleam of sunshine quivered on the green boughs, but only for a moment. The late summer flowers were yet blooming in brilliant profusion, scarlet and golden in color, reminding one that the more delicate blossoms had faded. And such a hush and stillness rested upon all the green world about ! That solemn silence which fills the woods, as though nature was mindful that in these, "God's first temples," one could draw nearer to Him than elsewhere. Only the birds sang and flaunted their lovely plumage before the two as they journeyed on.

The young men were silent, quietly drinking in the delicious sweetness around them, and each occupied with his own thoughts. Tom walked close by the side of the mule, and occasionally Rube looked down upon him with loving glance.

After a time, it was evident that Rube was growing very tired. Tom had not told Rube where he was taking him, and the boy had supposed, of course, that he was going to good Mrs. Tucker.

Thinking it might divert him from his weariness, Tom told him that he had been considering whether it would not be best for him to go and stay with Aunt Esther for a while.

"O Tom! and I shall not be with you? And Mrs. Tucker is so kind and so clean!"

"Yes, Rube, but I am sure she could not make you very comfortable there. There are so many children, and the house is so small, it is very hard for the boys to be still."

"I would n't mind the boys."

"Yes, you would, when your fever is on, and Aunt Esther lives all alone, in such a pleasant old house, among the trees. She is the best possible

nurse. Everybody wants her in sickness, and she is neat and clean, I can tell you. She is very kind too. And O Rube! she makes me think what my mother would have been to me!"

Tom's voice trembled, as it always did when he spoke of his mother.

Rube laid his hand lovingly upon his shoulder, and only said, "Just as you think best, old boy, I know you will fix it all right; only be sure you are around yourself pretty often."

"No fear of that," Tom replied.

But Rube was very tired. A round, red spot burned on his cheek, and his breath came in quick, short pants.

"Could n't we stop and rest a while?" asked Tom.

Rube was helped to dismount. Tom tied the mule to a tree, and then found a cool, shady spot for Rube to lie down, placing the little bundle of clothes which they had brought, under his head. The sick boy closed his eyes and soon was fast asleep.

Tom threw himself on the grass near by, and lay looking up through myriads of tiny twigs and

leaves into the far depths of a blue sky. How blue it was! and how white the clouds drifting over it! The green leaves which intercepted the light were very restful to his eyes.

But he was thinking, and his heart was full of anxious fear for Rube. He remembered how Mrs. Strong came down to the school to see them off, when they started for Mississippi. She had committed her son to his care, and though he was but three years older, Tom felt quite like a grandfather toward Rube. What if he should not get well! Oh, he would not think of that. Aunt Esther was such a remarkable nurse, and would do wonders for him.

Then he watched the sleeper and saw that the fever was rising. A little stream rushed along at mad speed, not far from where they lay. Tom dipped his handkerchief into its cooling depths, and coming back bathed the burning face and hands. Then he made a cup of a large, wide leaf that he found, and brought him some water to drink. Some berries grew near and Tom picked his hands full, and then persuaded Rube to sit up and help eat them.

Soon they began to talk of starting again. They were now nearly four miles from Aunt Esther's. It was slow traveling, and they might be obliged to stop again. So the old mule was brought to the roadside, and once more they were on their journey. But the skies were not so blue, nor the birds so gay ; the road did not seem so beautiful to either traveler. The veins of the one were throbbing with fever, and the heart of the other was heavy with anxiety.

After riding only a short distance, Rube manifested the same signs of weakness as before, and Tom mounted the mule himself, placing Rube before him. Held in Tom's strong arms, the sick boy rode more comfortably, and they were able to quicken their pace. Late in the afternoon they reached Aunt Esther's.

She was at home, and coming out to meet Tom, received the invalid as though she had expected him. Rube was greatly exhausted, and scarcely noticed where they were when they stopped. Without any confusion, and with very few words, Aunt Esther bade Tom carry him into the house, and lay him upon her own bed. Then she gave

him some cooling drinks and got him to bed, where he was soon so comfortable that he fell asleep.

Tom told his old friend the whole story ; how he had found Rube suffering and uncared for, and he easily won from her the promise to keep him, and cure him up.

“ Don’ know bout de *curin’*, honey. Dat ’s wid de Lord, an he looks mighty poorly. But we ’ll see.”

Tom went away feeling that if human care could do anything for Rube, he would receive it at Aunt Esther’s hands, and his heart went out to God with a great cry that he would send help and healing to his friend.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE SCHOOL IN THE COTTON SHED.

TOM finished his first experience in teaching in an old cotton shed, with only a roof above, and the earth beneath. It was not the flood that drove him forth from the church this time. The people were accustomed to have regular and stated periods for protracted meetings, and the continuance of his school in the church would interfere with their holding this meeting at the appointed time. In vain Tom begged to be allowed to finish his term, only a few weeks remaining. He promised to close early enough for the evening service, but evening in the South begins at twelve o'clock mid-day, or immediately after, and an evening service is at three o'clock in the afternoon. The Elder was not there, but the people were sure he would not be pleased with any such arrangement. They must have the church, and the school could take care of itself. So, reluctantly enough, the teacher

prepared to move his school for the third time in four months.

There was but little danger of rain at this season of the year, only occasional showers, and as the cabin formerly occupied could not be obtained, it was suggested that the cotton shed belonging to the Tucker place be used.

The shed was a place for storing cotton, but the new crop would not be ready to be picked for some time yet, and the old was sold and gone. It was a great open structure, the upper part of which was inclosed, but they were not permitted to use that, only the lower portion. Accordingly, all the rubbish was cleaned out, and this task, as well as all the other preparations, fell to Tom's lot again. All the long, bright Saturday that he had hoped to spend with Rube, was devoted to preparing the new schoolroom. Some of the boys came, and with willing hands helped in removing the débris, but they were only children, and their work required so much oversight that it was not much relief. It cheered Tom, however, to see them so ready to assist him, and that in itself made the work lighter.

The same arrangement for seating was made that had been used in the cabin. The benches were placed at one end of the building, the teacher's chair and table in front. Behind his back was a vast open space. The seats were about as uncomfortable as it was possible to make them, being narrow boards without backs, and placed so high upon the stumps on which they rested, that only the tallest boys and girls could reach the ground with their feet. The poor little children could only swing their limbs back and forth, or occasionally draw them up on the seat underneath them, in Oriental style.

No words of mine can describe the temptations from without as well as from within that befell those pupils. Outside were the tall, beautiful trees, waving and beckoning them to come and climb up into a leafy seat among their branches, where lessons could be learned so much better than while sitting there, so straight and stiff, on those hard boards. The birds sang so disturbingly loud and sweet, every note an invitation to come out and enjoy their freedom, which they were willing to share with the whole creation. They

grew bolder and more familiar every day, and seemed greatly interested in school affairs. The squirrels and rabbits frisked about in the grass so provokingly, inviting a chase, and oh! how hard it was for small boys to resist such a temptation! Truth compels me to say that they were frequently overcome.

Inside, the tall weeds and grass had been so recently cut that, for a time, the stubble was like sharp needles to the bare feet, and the hordes of insects and creeping things which had their home in its depths, were innumerable. These were continually going on exploring expeditions, and the frequent shrieks of timid little girls would startle the teacher and convulse the whole school with laughter. If there was any danger of quiet prevailing too long, there were enough mischievous boys to catch stray grasshoppers and send them flying into some one's face, thus renewing the cries of terror and of merriment.

Those were days that tried Tom's soul. His habitual patience nearly gave out, and he even thought it better to close the school and lose the last few weeks. But these times of discouragement

ment did not prevail with him. He knew that no other place could be provided, and there was something within him that refused to be beaten this way. He had taken the school for four months, and he would hold out, finishing the term, if his health and strength were continued to him. Thus while poor Rube had fought chills and fevers, Tom was not left without other kinds of trial, which would discipline him for yet harder battles in the future.

After one of his most discouraging times, it always happened that a fit of repentance would seize the whole school, and every child would be so good and study so diligently and make such advancement in his studies, that the teacher would wonder at his own despondency, and look forward to the close of the term with only regret and pain at the thought of parting with his pupils.

But beside the distracting care of a school, which was nearly the same as under the open heavens, Tom was constantly anxious in regard to Rube. He was more unfitted for his usual duties, because he spent nearly all his nights at Aunt Esther's house, in order to relieve her of the care

of the invalid. Rube did not always require a great deal of watching, but Tom lay on a couch in the room with him, ready to be called at any time, if needed.

For some time after his arrival at Aunt Esther's, Rube was very ill. The fever came every day, a low, malarial form, and when it left him late at night he was so weak that it seemed as though he might flit away at any time.

Aunt Esther was untiring in patience and tenderness and skill. She knew just what to do to relieve his pain as far as possible and make him comfortable, and knew just when to do it. Mrs. Tucker and others came frequently and relieved her, so that she did not get over-wearied, and Tom was careful that she should rest at night. The little children seemed to have disappeared since Rube came. The poor mother never spoke of them. Her heart and hands were full with the care of the sick boy, and it was only when lonely or weary that they hovered round her.

Sometimes, in his delirium, Rube thought she was his mother, and she always humored the fancy, patting and caressing him as his mother

would do. When the fever was the highest, she would lay her hand on his head, gently but firmly holding it there, while she sat with closed eyes, evidently in prayer, for Aunt Esther believed that He who when on earth was so compassionate toward the sick, had not lost his power to heal, though he had ascended into the heavens. Gradually the fever became less frequent, and though there was little sign of returning strength, Rube began to look about him, and to realize where he was.

Aunt Esther's house was a double log cabin, with an open passageway between the two parts. When she was alone, she occupied only one end, which consisted of a single room. But after Rube came, she slept in the part usually unoccupied, and did her work there, making it seem like a kitchen quite removed from the sight and hearing of the invalid.

The room in which Rube lay seemed to him the very chamber of peace, as he rested quietly, not sleeping, but lying there in the stillness, with the fresh morning air coming in at the open window and door, which looked toward the east,

but were shaded from the morning sun by the thick foliage of the trees. There was a window at the head of his bed, with the usual wooden door on hinges. This was closed at night, but in the daytime was thrown wide open for the air to stream in upon him. The heat of the summer was so far past that the sunshine was not unwelcome, coming through the trees, for the cabin was shaded on all sides.

His bed was perfectly clean, and very comfortable. The outside covering was a gayly patched quilt, dear to Aunt Esther's heart, and the work of her own hands. The white pillows were soft and easy, and Aunt Esther seemed able to produce plenty of them from stores of her own.

In the middle of the rough floor was spread a strip of bright rag carpet; an old-fashioned chest of drawers stood in one corner of the room, and a very dilapidated table was drawn up beside Rube's bed, covered with a fine, white damask tablecloth, well darned, but of a quality which spoke of other surroundings in earlier days.

There were no pictures on the walls, but strings of red pepper, bunches of pennyroyal, thorough-

wort, and other herbs whose medicinal properties Aunt Esther well understood, hung from the brown rafters above. Their pungent odors, mingling with the outside fragrance and freshness of the woods, were very pleasant to Rube.

The door was just opposite his bed, and this was nearly always open, so that as he lay there he could look away down into the deep recesses of the forest, for the trees came almost to the very door of the cabin, and the outside world of beauty was brought very near to him. The fantastic gray moss, swinging and swaying from the tall, old trees, afforded material for many a beautiful fancy to the sick boy, as he watched it day by day. Sometimes he grew tired of its forever stretching out its arms to him, as if to bring him something that never came.

Did the fever ever really leave him? That was the question that Tom began to ask very anxiously, when he came at night. At times, he seemed greatly improved, gayly welcoming Tom, having so many questions to ask about the school in the shed, interesting himself in all the vexatious details, and laughing over them with Tom, until

his friend would persuade himself that Rube was certainly better. But this encouragement was usually short-lived. Perhaps the next night Aunt Esther would meet him with uplifted finger and hushed voice; Rube had been having a "heap of misery," and had just fallen asleep after a day of suffering.

Rube knew Tom's footstep afar off, and his eyes fairly shone with joy when his friend entered the room. Their affection for each other was not manifested by fond words or caresses, but neither could keep from his face his great tenderness for the other.

Aunt Esther thought them wonderful boys, and wrapped the mantle of her own love as closely about them both as though they were her own lost boys.

Poor Rube was sometimes very much troubled about his school. He did not seem to consider that it was no longer his school, and probably never would be again. Each child was very dear to him, and in the long days of weakness, as he lay there in the shaded cabin, their names were all mentioned, pleadingly and lovingly before God, again and again.

"I did not bring any of them to Jesus, Aunt Esther," he said one day.

"How does ye know dat, honey?"

"Well, some of them did seem to love him, but they could not say so as surely as I wanted them to do."

"Jes ye leave dat wid de Lord, Rube. He knows His own, an' he 'll care for all dem chillen. Ye must trust him wid 'em, and believe he done loved 'em, 'fore ye did."

Then again, Rube would grow restless and anxious about the expense he was incurring, and an impatience with his own weakness would seize him. This always grieved Aunt Esther, for it seemed to reproach God, in whose care for His children she believed implicitly.

"Oh, chile," she would say, "ye 's got such a rich Father; yes, honey, a rich Father; for he is the Almighty. He 's so able to take care of all his chillen. Do ye reckon he 'd forget a little one like ye, when he 's so lovin' and tender? Oh, chile, trust him more."

Her strong faith would then seem to lift Rube up above anxieties into a region of peace again

and with a childlike trust he would leave all his cares with God. It was not a final victory, for Satan came again and again, to taunt him with needless fears, but each time Jesus was near to gather him up to himself again, whispering words of comfort. Oh, how often must He say to the tempted and tried, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me!" Believing in Him entirely puts to flight every care and doubt with which Satan can trouble a human soul.

Once when God had given Reuben a victory over his fears and troubles, and he was resting safely under the shadow of his wing, he said, "Aunt Esther, I know what Jesus will say to you, and to dear old Tom."

"What you mean, honey?"

Rube's little Bible was never far away, and finding it, he turned to Matthew 25: 35, 36, and read: "'I was a stranger, and ye took me in.' That means me, and it means you and Tom. I am one of the least of his little ones, but I am his, and you have done all this for me. Oh, I never knew what those beautiful words meant before: 'I was sick, and ye visited me.'"

The tears shone in Rube's eyes, but his voice was tremulous with emotion, and he added, speaking very slowly, "Yes, that is what Jesus will say to you and dear Tom, when you reach heaven; 'Inasmuch, as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.' I think that is one of the sweetest things in the Bible."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE REVIVAL.

THE protracted meeting began immediately after Tom withdrew his school from the church. The meetings were held every night, and as the interest waxed warmer there were gatherings at the church at all hours of the day.

Elder Maxwell was a fervid preacher, and a good man, sincerely desirous to promote the Master's cause. No one could bring any reproach against his character, and he did not fear to rebuke sin among his people. He was tall and rather attractive in appearance, with a face so expressive that one always turned to look at it a second time. It was dark, but the large, black eyes were brilliant and expressive. His hair was long and silky, parted in the middle, and falling down on both sides of the face in loose curls. But there was nothing effeminate in his appearance. His was a strong face, and when he became very earnest in

the pulpit, warning the people of God's wrath, or entreating them to turn from sin, his whole countenance seemed to glow with the flash and fire of his own intense feeling.

He was entirely uneducated so far as books and schools were concerned. He could read, but he often gave interpretations of the Bible that would be ludicrous if it were a subject to treat with ridicule. Deep down in his heart was an intense and passionate love for the Master. The experiences of life had at one time embittered his spirit, but that was all past, and now all the loyalty and devotion of his nature were given to the cause of Christ, and he sought to advance it according to his ability and his very limited knowledge of ways and means.

He preached in the plainest terms that sinners were going down to hell, depicting most vividly the horrors of future punishment, entirely regardless of modern views on that subject. Heaven, too, was real to him and to his hearers. However much one might wish to turn their thoughts to the importance of holy living as well as dying, it is not strange that a people who have found so little

of comfort on earth should be continually looking forward to the joys that they firmly believe await them in the life beyond.

At times there was the most intense excitement in the meetings. Cries and shrieks and swoons marked the progress of the services. Some of these were probably feigned; some were the natural expressions of a people unaccustomed to self-control, and who would manifest a similar excitement under other circumstances, where their emotional nature was wrought upon. There were some who sincerely believed that this was religion, or that there was religion in it. Their belief did not make it certain that they knew nothing about religion: they simply knew no other way of seeking God, and had never learned that He was not in the thunder or in the earthquake. It is said that an ignorant people are always a demonstrative people; but it is a question whether generations of culture will reduce the warm, responsive nature of the black man to the cool, calm temperature of his white brother. And if it could be done, its desirability might be another question.

There was the usual rhythmic swaying of the

body, backward and forward, and beating of the feet as the preacher's voice rose and fell; and when spiritual exaltation reached still higher, the hands were brought together with a clap that stirred others to similar expressions. It was an interesting study to look upon their faces; some of them, particularly those of the older women, were almost ecstatic in expression. Sometimes one would sit for a long time in perfect silence, then as her own emotions or the preacher's fervor reached a climax, she would utter a piercing shriek and fall down as if dead.

Elder Maxwell knew just how to touch the emotional nature of a susceptible people; and when they were wrought up to the highest pitch of excitement, he knew how to bring them down to a tranquillity and repose that were perfectly surprising to one who had witnessed the tumult and frenzy that had prevailed.

Tom was almost a stranger to such demonstrations in religious worship. Before going to school, he had been to meeting but a few times in his life, and his religious education was of a very different character. He had attended the colored churches

a few times in T—— but had never witnessed much of this excessive excitement. He was, however, familiar with the expressions used, and knew from his own contact with the people that the wildest ideas in regard to Christian experience prevailed.

When he first attended the meetings, the state of things alarmed him, and he feared for their influence on the children and young people. His serious nature would have recoiled from anything like ridiculing that which was to another an act of worship, but it was all very distasteful to him, and with something like sorrow he found himself not at all in sympathy with the meetings.

He was not able to attend very much, on account of Rube's illness, and Elder Maxwell missing him, sought him out and tried to labor with him for his apparent want of interest. They had a long free talk which resulted in a better understanding between them. The Elder represented the past generations of colored people, and clung to their ways. He was as simple-hearted as a child and expressed to Tom his joy at the improved condition of his people. He was glad that the

young people were likely to learn more intelligent forms of worship.

“But, young man,” he said, “don’t you turn away from the ole folks’ religion, and despise it till you know you ’ve got something better. Kase ole Satan ’s round, and he ’ll set a snare for your feet. A religion that has too much noise in it is better ’n nary kind, and that ’s just what I ’m fearin’ for the young, that gets thar heads sot high with larnin’.”

Before he parted with Tom, however, he seemed to feel that the young man was not one of those whom Satan had taken in his snares, but was really a child of God. Tom, on his part, promised to attend the meetings in the future, whenever he could leave Rube. This he did, and gradually he came to feel more at home there ; not that he sympathized any more with the unnecessary excitement, but he recognized the fact that God’s children were there, and that it was not for him to say that no good could come out of it.

And God used him, when he least thought of it.

Often when the tumult was the greatest, he would go quietly forward and kneel among the

“mourners,” lifting up his voice in prayer, in an ordinarily low tone. Gradually, the confusion about him would cease, only a fervent “Amen!” or “Glory to God!” or “Dat’s a true word, my Lord!” being uttered in response to his earnest supplication. Tom had power with God, young disciple as he was. He had learned the secret of the Most High, and when he came into his Father’s presence all who heard his words were touched, and felt themselves drawn into an atmosphere of prayer.

Mrs. Abe Tucker was a shining light in those meetings. She went about among the seekers, in almost every meeting, talking and praying and singing with them, in her efforts to bring them into a proper state of mind.

They sang a great deal. Sometimes when others were in prayer, one would sing in a low monotone,

The Lord is waiting to receive, O Zion, Zion,  
If sinners only would believe, O Zion, Zion.

Or, in a more cheerful, encouraging tone, several voices would sing,

All I want is a little more faith in Jesus.  
The Lord is on the giving hand,  
A little more faith in Jesus.

Then, when they rose from prayer, and all joined in singing, their voices filled the old church with a jubilant song, and rang joyfully out upon the summer stillness of the night.

Oh ! this old time religion,  
This old time religion,  
Is good enough for me !  
It will carry you home to heaven,  
It will carry you home to heaven,  
It is good enough for me !

Several of Tom's pupils were converted in the meetings. In this he rejoiced, never doubting for a moment the genuineness of their faith. Indeed, the interest manifested by the children and young people first drew him into active labor in the meetings. The seed that he had been sowing in Sabbath school bore fruit there, and he was glad to put forth his hand to the reaping.

Little Jake Tucker was one of the converts. Sally was continually exhorted to come forward as a mourner, and make her salvation sure ; but she persisted in maintaining that she was a Christian girl, " living to please Jesus." Her mother had watched her life, and although she preferred to



"HE WAS VERY SLOW TO LEARN, BUT TOM WAS VERY PATIENT."



see her "come through," in the regular way, yet she was satisfied that Sally did know the Lord.

Uncle Philip was an old man in whom Tom had been greatly interested since his first acquaintance with him. He had come to know him well, very soon after he opened his school at the Landing; for the old man came to him and begged him to teach him to read. He could not attend school in the daytime, but was exceedingly anxious to learn to read and to write. "Jes' to write my own name," he said.

Tom readily undertook the task, going to Uncle Philip's house at night and on Saturdays.

Uncle Philip was old and bent, and slightly lame from a wound received at Vicksburg. He was very black, but his face was strong and resolute. He always wore an old blue coat, on which the brass buttons shone, as if freshly burnished.

He was very slow to learn, but Tom was very patient and faithful. There was something so pathetic about the old man, in his anxiety to learn, and Tom had found that he was all alone in the world, having lost his wife and children before the war. He was not a professing Christian. He

openly said that he did not care for God. With a bitter scorn, he had always laughed at people who thought they "got religion."

One night, when he and Tom had been toiling over the intricacies of a spelling lesson, Uncle Philip said,

"Don't ye get weary, tryin' to teach me ; I 'se *boun'* to learn, if I is hard-headed."

But when the writing lesson came, he found still greater difficulty in trying to form the refractory letters of his own name. His fingers were stiff and hard with toil, and there were seams on the wrists and hands where the skin was darker than the rest. Laying down his pencil despairingly, and glancing at his hands, he said,

"Wore irons on my hands and wrists once so long, dat 's what dun makes 'em so stiff. De best of my days war spent toilin' for others, an' de lash war all I ever got for it. De irons were put on me kase I 'se allus tryin to run away."

"Uncle Philip, did you ever pray, when you were in such trouble?" asked Tom.

"No, don't know nothin' 'bout prayin' — don't want to. God did n't keer for us in dem days."

“Oh! yes, he did. He gave you your freedom.”

The old man was silent, but gloomy and bitter.

After the meetings began, Tom sought him out, and urged him to attend.

“I don’t want to go to no meetin’s,” he replied. “I tell ye God don’t keer for such an ole sinner.”

But Tom was patient with him, trying in every way to show him that God did love him. Never in his Christian life had Tom known such a burden of prayer for any one as he felt for this lonely old man, who had suffered so much in his past life, but had never learned God’s love for sinners.

One night, toward the close of the meetings, Tom went in rather late. He had not been present for two or three nights, but to his surprise, after taking his seat, he saw Uncle Philip among the “mourners,” his head bowed as if in prayer, and all about him engaged in earnest supplication for the Lord to come “dis one time more, and convert dis *ole* sinner.”

Tom dropped on his knees and silently prayed.

And God heard the prayer. Uncle Philip left all his bitterness and hardness of heart at the feet of Jesus. He beheld a Saviour who had "borne his griefs and carried his sorrows," even in the long years of bondage, and his own heart was filled with a love for him and for all the world.

"Pears like I loves everybody," he said, as one and another grasped his hand.

His tears fell fast, and he could not control his voice for the weeping that had seized him, but they were tears of joy — the first real joy he had ever known.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## THE CLOSE OF SCHOOL.

**THE** beautiful Southern summer was fading. The sunshine was losing its golden splendor, and the earth looked brown and bare. Occasionally, one saw a tree clothed in dazzling scarlet, but the falling leaves generally lacked that brilliancy of color that the frosts would give them, and were only faintly touched with crimson and gold. The corn-stalks were growing brown in the fields, stripped of their yellow wealth and waving plumes. Only the cotton remained, and the picking season was at hand.

Everybody had taken to the cotton field. The men left every other occupation for this ; and the idle ones who had done nothing all summer roused themselves to something like interest when the forces were mustered for gathering the great crop of the South. The women deserted their kitchens and worked with nimble fingers, packing

the overflowing baskets with the snowy balls. Several of the older pupils had already left school, and Tom was urged to close as soon as possible, for every child was needed in the cotton field. It was the busy season for the planter, and all available help was brought into requisition.

For a long time, Tom had been preparing for an exhibition with which to close his school. He was very desirous to have as many as possible of the parents of his pupils and the friends of the school present. The cotton picking promised to seriously interfere with his project.

He had been able to continue his Sabbath school in the church, uninterrupted by the meetings, and there he spoke to the people about his anxiety in regard to their attendance. He told them that he wished them to come to the examinations of the classes, which would be held in connection with other closing exercises, and that he particularly desired them to see what improvement the children had made in their various studies.

"We don' know nothin' 'bout yer books, an' sech, nohow," said one brother, good-naturedly.

“We b’lieves ye ’ve had a tolerable good school, an’ we shouldn’t know no more ef we leff de cotton-pickin an’ kem to hear de chillens.”

But others thought that they owed it to the teacher to sacrifice a day, if need be, and come at his request.

Finally, Elder Maxwell added his voice decidedly in favor of their attendance. He had come in late, but had heard enough of the discussion to know what it was.

“Brethren, the cotton won’t hurt. You can spare one day from the fields to come and see what your chillens have been doing for the last three or four months. Brother North’s been faithful and true to you and to your chillens, and you ought to come to please him. Just remember that our fathers and mothers were never invited to no sech doin’s, in their day. When we was chillens we learned our lessons out thar in the cotton fields, an’ the lash would have kem down on us ef we had tried to study these yere books that you see every little woolly head now carries long the road, so proud.”

Elder Maxwell generally used better language

than the country people. Though his opportunities had been very limited, he had done all in his power to improve himself in every possible manner. "All for the Master's cause," he said. "I owe it to Him to be as much of a man as I can, though I am too old ever to be a scholar." But when he became very much interested, he would relapse into his early manner of speaking, which was the vernacular of those about him.

The subject of education interested him deeply. He seemed to have a burden of soul for the young ; to feel that a great trust was committed to them for their whole people, and he trembled lest they should be unfit for the responsibility.

It was therefore decided that there should be an exhibition at the close of school at the Landing, and the people considered themselves pledged to attend.

Those were busy days for Tom. His school demanded all his time and attention, but he was never without anxiety in regard to Rube. He never permitted a day to pass in which he did not visit him, and he generally spent his nights with him. He wrote to Professor Earle and also to Mrs. Strong of Rube's protracted illness.

Mrs. Strong sent money for Rube to come home, and Professor Earle urged his coming, as soon as he was able to travel, without waiting for Tom. But Rube had no strength to undertake the journey alone. It would doubtless be better for him to be at home with his mother, but it was very evident that he could not go until some degree of strength returned to him. Day after day he lay in the shaded room of the little cabin, or on his better days was carried outside of the door, to sit under the old trees.

Aunt Esther usually sat with him, and he never tired of her. She sat quietly by his side, or went softly back and forth from the cabin, busying herself about her work. She was silent, or talked, as the mood suited him, and was quick to see which he preferred.

When the days were warm enough, he often remained out there for a long time, with his eyes partly closed, lying back in his comfortable chair, with the delightful sensation that contact with the earth and trees and sky gives. The wind gently sighing through the trees, swayed the branches over his head, and the gray old moss sometimes

touched his face and rested lovingly upon his hair.

He missed Tom sadly, in those latter days of school, but he was interested in the exhibition for which they were preparing, and when he had strength to listen, Tom told him all about the work he had in hand, and of his plans and prospects for the closing exercises.

Poor Rube had ceased to talk of returning to his school; he knew how impossible that had become; but it was still with many a heart pang that he thought of his own brief dismissal of the children at Salem Centre. Some of the children, and two or three of the old people had been over to the Landing to see him, since he had been at Aunt Esther's. They were very sorrowful at the thought that he would not return to finish his school, for Rube had made many warm friends among the parents as well as the children, and they expressed a hope that he would be able to come back to them the next year. The possibility that Rube's life-work was nearly finished did not once suggest itself to them, nor indeed to any but to Aunt Esther, who saw with wise as well as loving eyes.

A great fear haunted Tom ; a fear that he would not permit to enter his heart, but which stole in and entered the citadel often, when he was unaware. It made him restless and anxious, and increased his care tenfold, and yet he said to himself repeatedly that Rube was doing well. Just as soon as school closed he would take him on the boat up the river, and when he got home to his mother he would soon recover his strength, and be the same jolly Rube as ever.

The meetings closed when the cotton picking began.

The closing exercises of the last day of school were to be held in the church, but Tom thought it best not to remove the school again until then, as only a few days remained.

The children had become more accustomed to their out-of-doors building, and were less tempted by the song of birds and the frisking of squirrels. The squirrels and rabbits, however, had deserted the school, and had gone industriously to work, gathering nuts and acorns for future need, evidently valuing a store of food more highly than the store of knowledge which the school offered.

Tom's pupils were very diligently employed in those last days. Laggards always work harder when examination days approach, if ever, and the faithful ones always find enough to review and to fix more firmly in the mind. They had very vague ideas of what an exhibition meant, but they had learned what an examination was, and were anxious to acquit themselves well in the presence of their friends. Early and late hours were devoted to knotty problems that had puzzled them in their solution, and the teacher had little reason to complain of inattention to any branch of study that had been pursued.

When the final day arrived, the school assembled once more in the old brown church, taking up quarters there for the third time, since its opening.

How long ago that seemed to Tom as he hurried along in the fresh morning air ! The summer sun no longer looked down upon him with scorching rays ; the corn field was nearly as brown and dreary as the uncultivated fields in front of the church, where the dead trees and stumps looked more unsightly than ever. But the mighty river was

there, wide and strong, though more quiet in asserting its power. Sometimes, though rarely, it was even peaceful, with a solemn quiet brooding over it, like the "peace of God" that comes to human hearts.

So it seemed this morning, as Tom paused for a moment and gazed upon its broad expanse, while something of the same peace stole into his heart, and prepared him for the trying day that awaited him. The children came promptly and took the places formerly occupied in the old high-backed seats. A large number of the friends had also assembled when the time came for opening school. Easy-going and dilatory as they were inclined to be, they had evidently decided that if a day was to be given to educational interests, they would give all of it.

The school was opened, as usual, with singing, reading of the Scriptures, and prayer. Then the forenoon was occupied in the examination of classes. Every class in school was called upon, and every pupil had an opportunity to show how well, or how ill he had improved the shining hours. Parents watched their children with ap-

proving glances, or if they seemed to stumble, a threatening murmur reached their ears and spurred them on to well-doing. Old people who could not themselves read a word gave a pleased attention, and smiled with the deepest satisfaction at the attainments exhibited by the scholars. It was a gratification to them, perhaps beyond the comprehension of more favored parents, to see their children drinking at fountains of knowledge which had been denied them and their fathers through long generations.

It was a great day at the Landing. The county superintendent was present, and several other white men, who were on friendly terms with Tom, and who had watched the progress of the school with interest, came in, and seemed greatly pleased with the examinations.

The colored people came from all directions, and for one day the cotton fields were deserted.

In the afternoon, a still larger crowd gathered, to listen to the speeches of the little folks. There were no original productions, but neatly dressed little girls gave some well chosen recitations, and the boys declaimed to a very admiring audience.

The singing was greatly enjoyed. The whole school had practised early and late on this part of the exercise, and their fresh, young voices rang out with a sweetness and clearness that could not fail to delight any lover of music.

At the close, Elder Maxwell addressed the people on the general subject of education; the possibilities for the future of their people, and the great responsibilities that would rest upon the young people as they came to years of maturity. Especially did he urge the necessity of giving to their children a Christian education; a culture, which, while it developed them intellectually, should not divorce them from the religion of their fathers. He seemed to have a fear lest the coming generations should forsake the God whose mighty hand had led them out of bondage.

The thoughtful character of the address, delivered in strong, forcible language, though using much of the quaint dialect of the people, would have interested any audience.

The people responded heartily from time to time, just as in a religious meeting; giving their assent to the speaker's words by fervent "Amens!" and "Dat 's so, de Lord knows!"

Tom then offered a few words of farewell, thanking the people for their interest in the school, and for sustaining him so heartily in all his efforts to promote the good of his pupils. For their personal kindness to him, since he first came among them, he could scarcely find words to express his gratitude. His voice trembled with emotion, and when he sat down, the people with united voices cheered him till the old church rang, and the shout sounded out across the wide and silent river.

Then the people rose, and Elder Maxwell dismissed them with God's blessing.

They dispersed to their various homes, feeling that it had been a good day. The children lingered for many a tender good-bye to their teacher, but at last they were all gone, and Tom had finished his first term of teaching.

## CHAPTER XX.

## GOING HOME.

TOM closed school on Thursday because a Memphis boat was due at Callioka Landing on Saturday, and he wanted Friday for final preparations, that Rube need not be tired with too hurried a departure. The arrival of this boat was a little uncertain, but he hoped to get off before Saturday night, and his first thought after the school closed was that he was now ready for the Memphis boat, or would be when it arrived.

With a great throb of joy he thought how glad he should be to see Rube safely at home under his mother's care, and then he would be sure to be all right very soon. The care of his school had so taken his attention that he had not seen much of Rube for a day or two, except at night, and he had felt obliged to leave so early in the morning that he could not tell just how it was with his invalid. When he left him so early he did not

usually speak to Rube, but called just for a moment after he had been home for his breakfast, and was on his way to school, only to say good morning, and good-bye for the day.

On the morning of his closing exercises, he left Aunt Esther's house while Rube was asleep, and did not stop on his way to school, for he was in haste to be early at the church, and there were many things that required his attention.

Early in the afternoon a messenger came from Aunt Esther, telling him to be very sure to come as soon as he could leave school, but the message had not alarmed him. He had only thought how long the day was to Rube, who would wish to know all about the exercises. More than once in the course of the day he hoped Rube would be strong enough to hear all about it, and thought how eagerly he would listen, when he sat by his bed at night, and told him how well the children did in examinations, how nicely they looked, and how pleased the old people were.

When the last child said good-bye, and there were many tearful farewells, from which it would have been hard for Tom to hurriedly turn away,

since he should not see them again — when they were all gone at last, he hastily gathered up his books, closed the old church with something like a sigh, and with rapid strides made his way to Aunt Esther's cabin. Not a thought of the sorrow that lay before him entered his soul, so suddenly do the shadows deepen about us sometimes.

As he approached the house, he saw that several people had stopped on their way from the church, and the sound of their voices reached his ear, as he went swiftly up the shaded path. He paused a moment at the door, before he was observed. They were all gathered round the bed, and Aunt Esther was begging some one to go for Tom. He stepped forward and they moved away for him. Rube was going home — not by the Memphis boat, but with the pale boatman who was waiting to carry him over the river to the Celestial City, to the Father's house, where he should go no more out forever.

He lay back upon his pillows, white and still, breathing faintly but unconscious of all about him.

The women were quiet after Tom's entrance, and the room was still. Others came, but they remained outside, talking in low, hushed voices.

Tom was so stunned, so bewildered at first, that he could not take it in; he sat down by the bed, and gazed helplessly and appealingly at Aunt Esther, and then down upon the still white face. Ah, there was no mistaking that look. It comes but once, and however dear the face may be, or however unfamiliar with death one may be, it is always recognized.

Tom lifted the brown curls from the damp brow, and with loving touch smoothed the pale face and hands, but there was no response. Life was fast ebbing away. Tom was in an agony of grief, bitterly upbraiding himself for what seemed to him like cruel neglect. That he should be making speeches, and listening to so many empty words, while Rube, dear little Rube, lay dying.

He turned away from the bed with a groan. How could he bear it? He went to the window and looked out upon the still, deep forest, where the shadows were already gathering. But it was with eyes that saw not. His strong, young soul was full of anguish, and he was not yet quiet enough in his heart to hear the voice of the Lord speaking unto him. So many other

voices clamored, and most of all, this cruel self-reproach that stung and lashed him so unmercifully. He had never looked upon death before, and had not permitted himself to think that Rube might die.

Aunt Esther came to his side and whispered something in his ear. She was calm and quiet, and her touch upon his arm, and gentle voice soothed Tom. She was stayed upon God. He was keeping her in perfect peace. She told Tom that he must watch Rube very closely, he might go at any moment, and he would be sure to know his dear Tom before he died, and might be able to speak to him.

“Don’t take your eyes off from his face, honey chile. Be ready if he tries to speak.”

It was good for Tom to feel this sense of responsibility, and he watched Rube, as many a watcher has gazed into the face of a loved one who is treading the dark valley. And as he watched, his heart grew more quiet, and the Lord spoke comforting words to him. He knew that Rube was not alone among the shadows. He was leaning upon the strong arm of the Beloved. As this assurance

crept into Tom's heart, while he watched, he was comforted. Jesus surely had been with Rube all day, and his own presence was nothing. Perhaps the dear Lord had made Rube understand it all so well that he had not felt his absence so much.

For hours the breath still came, faint and soft. Sometimes it seemed to fail, but not altogether. About midnight the change came. A glow, a kind of halo spread over the beautiful face. Rube opened his eyes, and looked at Tom, with such a smile as an angel might give.

"Good-bye, dear Tom!—Tell my mother."

Then a gasp, a sigh, and all was over. Yes, he had gone — gone home.

Tom buried his face in the pillow, and wept, as strong men weep. There were other voices sobbing in the room and outside; their cries broke upon the solemn stillness of the night.

It had become known throughout the neighborhood, before dark, that the teacher's friend lay dying, and several friends who had been kind to Rube, and who sympathized with Tom, came to the cabin, nearly all remaining outside and watching until they should be needed. After it was all over, they all came to the door, and looked upon the dead.

Tom's grief seemed to intensify their ready sympathy, and soon a low wail rose on the midnight silence—a dirge, solemn and sad, but sweet and full of the hope of the resurrection.

We shall walk through the valley and the shadow of death,  
We shall walk through the valley in peace,  
If Jesus Himself shall be our Leader,  
We shall walk through the valley in peace.

Again and again, was the sad refrain repeated, rising on the still night air, and softly echoing down the leafy aisles of the forest.

Those in the room swayed backward and forward, softly patting their feet on the floor, and lifting their eyes upward. The long lingering tones were peculiarly sad and yearning, which made it seem more like one united voice of prayer than of song. Then they sang,—

Prepare me, prepare me, Lord,  
When death shall shake this frame,  
As I go down the stream of time,  
When death shall shake this frame,  
I'll leave this sinful world behind,  
When death shall shake this frame,  
Prepare me, prepare me, Lord,  
When death shall shake this frame.

One voice, a fresh, young voice of exceeding sweetness, led in singing —

Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus,  
Steal away, steal away home.

I have not long to stay here,  
My Lord calls me, He calls me by the thunder,  
The trumpet sounds it in my soul,  
I have not long to stay here.

The voice of weeping was hushed in song. Even Tom's violent grief was soothed for a time, and one strain kept time in his heart. "He shall walk through the valley in peace." What peace rested upon the fair, young face, lying cold and white, upon the pillow by his side! It was God's peace! No more anxieties and cares for Rube. He had entered into the gates, and his feet were even now treading the golden streets of the city of God.

They persuaded Tom to go out under the trees, while kind hands cared for the dead. He walked a little way down the path, and silently leaned against one of the old trees, not yet fully comprehending the loss that had fallen upon him. The stars were shining, the dew rested upon every twig and leaf, and all nature was hushed and silent.

The light from the cabin streamed out from the open door, and he saw the people gliding back and forth.

Once Abe Tucker came down the path, and stood a few moments by Tom's side, without a word, just to give his silent sympathy, for he laid his hand upon Tom's shoulder for a moment, and the touch was gentle and tender as a mother's; then he turned away.

Tom was unused to suffering. His life had been full enough of gloom, with little of actual joy, but he had never borne grief or known deep sorrow. A sharp, fierce pain was at his heart, and he uttered a bitter cry. "Oh, Rube! Rube! how could you go away so suddenly, so entirely?" But the soul's cry of anguish can only be answered by God himself; he was not far from Tom, and would comfort him, when he could again get his ear so that his voice might be heard.

After a while, the people nearly all went away, only Mrs. Tucker and one or two other women staying for the remaining part of the night.

Tom went back to the cabin, and found Aunt Esther was completely worn out with grief and

care. All the little phantom children were at home once more, and very clamorous for attention from their mammy. With gentle persuasion Tom urged her to go to her bed and rest. He saw at once that his duty was to Aunt Esther. He could do nothing more for Rube, who was beyond his poor care, but he well knew that no one could soothe Aunt Esther so quickly as himself. And it was well for Tom that the living demanded his attention.

Instead of sitting by his dead and weeping bitter tears of grief and reproach to himself, he took his place by the bedside of this dear old saint, who so patiently and uncomplainingly had cared for Rube. His quiet presence by her side always soothed Aunt Esther, and after a while the aching head and tortured nerves yielded to the stillness about her, and became more quiet. Little Alfred and Hepsy and the baby vanished, as they came, and the poor, weary mother whose heart had almost broken in her longing for them, slept. When the morning broke, she was resting quietly. When he saw that he was no longer needed, Tom looked one moment at the still, straight form on the bed in the

other room, and then rushed away with choking sobs. He went through the woods in the gray and silent morning to the Tucker cabin. Oh, how long it was since he left it the morning before ! Those closing exercises of his school, which had been so important and so interesting, how insignificant they all seemed now, and so far away !

There was as yet no one stirring in the Tucker cabin, so he went quietly to his own room, and threw himself upon his bed, but he could not sleep. After an hour or more of tossing and groaning, he rose, unrefreshed and weary enough. His first thought, after giving the attention required to his toilet, was to go out again, to see what duties awaited him.

But Abe Tucker had heard him come in, and knowing that he did not go to sleep, had risen, and now had a hot cup of coffee and some breakfast nearly ready. Tom was obliged to stop, and the thoughtful kindness prepared him to go forth and meet whatever lay before him. It was impossible to communicate with Mrs. Strong before the burial must take place. There were no telegraphic lines from the Landing, and no mails except by boats. There

would be a boat on Saturday, the boat Tom had almost engaged passage on for himself and Rube ; but these boats were slow, indeed, for carrying such intelligence.

Tom went directly to Elder Maxwell for advice.

The Elder received him most tenderly, and was like a father to him, in his affliction. He wisely advised him to bury his dead, and then go immediately to Rube's mother.

"It seems cruel to the poor mother, to bury her boy before she knows he has gone, but there is no other way, and may God help her. May he help you, too, my boy, when you have to tell her, but he will. You put your trust in him, and he 'll see you through."

Yes, it would be heavy tidings for Tom to carry. He knew how Mrs. Strong's heart was bound up in her boy — her beautiful boy — "too pretty to grow up in ignorance," as she had once fondly said to Mrs. Earle.

The funeral was held on Saturday, in the old brown church, which was crowded with sympathizing friends. Many came from Salem Centre, both children and older people. Abe Tucker had been

careful to send them word. Elder Maxwell preached from Revelation 22: 4, "And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads."

There was much weeping. Sighs and groans filled the house, as the Elder spoke of the fair young life that had gone out in their midst — cut off in his early youth, in which there was such promise of usefulness. But when he spoke of the "gain," it was to Rube to go thus early to his Father's house, to escape all the storms of life, and forever more dwell in his presence, where he should see his face, and receive a welcome from the Master himself, then there were glad shouts of praise as if the pearly gates were already opened so that the auditors caught glimpses of the glory within.

"And my friends," continued the speaker, "remember God does not reckon up a life as we do. It is not so much to him, what we do, as what we are. Our doings amount to very little in his sight, at best, but our knowledge of God, our willingness to do, or to suffer his will, and our trust in him — these are what are precious in his sight; and I believe he saw all these in our young brother."

They buried Rube in a sheltered spot back from

the river, where a few graves had already been made. The fields now were bare and brown. The leaves were falling from the trees, and the winds had scattered them along the winding road. They were sere and yellow; all brightness and freshness had faded from them.

As they stood about the grave, with bowed heads, with sad, low voices, they sang,

My brother's took his flight, and gone home,  
And the angels waiting at the door,  
He has laid down his cross, and gone home,  
And the angels waiting at the door.  
He has taken up his crown, and gone home,  
And the angels waiting at the door,  
Tell all my Father's children,  
Don't you grieve for me.

It was a song of victory, even at an open grave. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." And this victory had come to Reuben Strong.

There were children from Salem Centre there, whose names he had so often mentioned before the Lord, as he lay upon his sick bed. They had given their young lives to God. After they knew how

ill their young teacher was, they had met in their schoolroom and held a little prayer meeting, as he had done when with them. They met to pray for him, but God sent answers into their own souls, and several of them had come into the clear knowledge of sins forgiven which Rube had asked for them. Might not these be trained to take up the work their teacher had laid down, they in turn winning others to Christ, so that the power of this young life would reach far down the line of time, though to mortal sight it had been cut off when just beginning its work?

And now it only remained for Tom to gather up his few possessions and those of his friend, and then hasten away. It was a sad leave-taking, when on Monday night he took the boat for Memphis, at the same Landing, where four months before, he and Rube arrived, on that dreary, dismal night. Now, he was alone. Rube had taken passage on another boat, to a fairer shore. His lifework was finished, Tom's only just begun.















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